



# **Baseline measurements for the evaluation of the work-related stress campaign**

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# **Baseline measurements for the evaluation of the work-related stress campaign**

**A Pilkington, R E Mulholland,  
H A Cowie, MK Graham and  
P A Hutchinson**

**Institute of Occupational Medicine  
8 Roxburgh Place  
Edinburgh  
EH8 9SU  
United Kingdom**

The objectives of the study were to evaluate employers' attitudes towards work-related stress as a legitimate health and safety issue; and to establish whether employers are taking, and reviewing, action to reduce the risk of work-related stress.

The survey involved a telephone interview with a random selection of 1600 small to large organisations across the range of industry sectors, using a structured computer based questionnaire. One hundred follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of organisations who had implemented or evaluated initiatives to address work-related stress.

Almost 90% of respondents felt that stress could cause work-related illness. Although, findings by company size suggest that larger organisations are more likely to recognise stress as a problem, and to acknowledge a change in attitude towards the issue over the last two years. Almost 80% of respondents felt that stress should be controlled in the same way as other health and safety issues.

The proportion of organisations who reported taking steps to reduce work-related stress increased with organisation size. The results emphasised the variety of factors that influence response to stress in the workplace. Organisations appear to act on many cues without necessarily having a set framework. And in general, the results show that the benefits, and associated costs, of any organisational interventions are not evaluated.

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# SUMMARY

## *Background*

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has launched a number of initiatives aimed at addressing work-related stress and providing more comprehensive data on the scale of the problem. The results of the public consultation exercise on 'Managing Stress at Work' concluded that work-related stress is a serious problem and a health and safety issue, which can be tackled in part through legislation. The HSE plans to launch a campaign to promote work-related stress as a legitimate health and safety issue and provide practical advice to employers.

HSE defines work-related stress as the adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them; it arises when they feel they cannot cope. HSE makes a clear distinction between external pressures or demands and stress itself.

## *Objectives*

- To evaluate employers' attitudes towards work-related stress as a legitimate health and safety issue;
- To establish whether employers are taking action to reduce the risk of work-related stress;
- To establish whether employers regularly review the actions they have taken.

HSE's definition of work-related stress was used throughout the study.

## *Conduct of the study*

The survey involved a telephone interview with a random selection of small to large organisations across the range of industry sectors, using a structured computer based questionnaire. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of those organisations who had implemented or evaluated specific initiatives to address work related stress.

Organisations were selected from national databases covering the main industry sectors. The industry sectors included Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Manufacturing, Construction, Retail, Financial Services, Transport, Emergency Services, Education, Health Care and Local Government. 1600 companies were contacted, aiming to select 160 from each of ten industry sectors and planned to include 1280 SMEs and 320 large organisations, comprising 64 small, 64 medium and 32 large companies from each sector. The targets were met for all sectors except Emergency Service organisations, for which it did not prove possible to identify sufficient small and medium enterprises.

The response rate for the initial telephone survey was 46%. MORI were employed to conduct the telephone interviews, using a structured computerised questionnaire designed by the IOM team. The interview enquired about perceived levels of workplace stress, whether stress was considered a health and safety issue, and procedures to address work-related stress. Attitudes to work-related stress, awareness and willingness to use available resources to address work-related stress were considered. Specific initiatives introduced to address stress in the workplace, and barriers to introducing such initiatives were also considered.

Where the initial interview suggested that companies had introduced specific interventions for work-related stress, a further telephone interview was conducted by the IOM to obtain further details of these initiatives. One hundred follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with, 33 small (<50 employees), 34 medium (50-250 employees) and 33 large (>250 employees) employers. The sample covered a broad range of organisations across the different sizes and sectors of employers. The follow up interviews included: trigger factors for introducing interventions; decisions on interventions used; the interventions/initiatives used; and outcomes, and evaluation of effectiveness of interventions used.

Within the short timescale of the study, results and conclusions were based principally on data descriptions, sub-classified by the three organisational size ranges (small, medium and large organisations) and, separately, by industry sector.

### *Key findings*

The survey provided good coverage of SMEs with 46.9% of total companies surveyed employing less than 50 employees and 28.5% employing between 50 and 250. Response rates achieved were similar for both small and large companies. Industry sectors as classified by SIC '92 were all represented fairly evenly

Findings by company size suggest that larger organisations are more likely to recognise stress as a problem in their company and more likely to acknowledge a change in attitude over the last 2 years. Large companies were more likely to have a written policy to address stress related problems and be more willing to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce workplace stress. Specific industries who followed this pattern were Emergency Services, Health Care and Local Government and to a lesser extent the Education sector.

Almost 90% of respondents felt that stress could cause work-related illness although only 27.2% felt it was true for their company. This was true across all sizes of organisation. However, the Emergency Services, and Local Government and to a lesser extent the Health Care sector are more likely to consider workplace stress a problem for their company than most other industry sectors. Attitudes to stress were more likely to have changed in the last 2 years in Education, Local Government and among Emergency Services. The positive changes reported were mostly associated with increased awareness due to media coverage and a more sympathetic approach from managers.

Almost 80% of respondents felt that stress should be controlled in the same way as other health and safety issues, and therefore considered it to be a legitimate health and safety issue. In general companies across different sizes and sectors favoured a holistic approach to tackling stress, acknowledging both work and non work-related components. Approximately 55% of all respondents were willing to consider working in partnership with other agencies or groups.

Most organisations felt that they would benefit from having more guidance about how to address work-related stress. Larger organisations felt a code of practice, or specific legislation may be useful, whereas smaller organisations preferred information on 'what others are doing', to help them develop similar initiatives. Appropriate training for line managers and supervisors was a favoured option among respondents. Over 40% of respondents were currently unaware of any resources to address work-related stress, and this was particularly so for companies employing less than 50 people.

Approximately forty per cent (286) of respondents stated that their company had taken steps to reduce workplace stress. The proportion of companies who reported taking steps to reduce stress increased as company size increased, from 28% among small companies to 42% among medium, and 58% among large companies. Across all sectors, senior management were most influential in making decisions about which initiatives to introduce. However, organisations were also more frequently encouraging employee participation in decision making. In planning a future strategy, employee participation initiatives are likely to be well received.

Companies reporting increased or similar levels of stress in the last 12 months were most willing to discuss their interventions, as were those reporting a change in attitude to workplace stress over the last 2 years. Companies expressing a willingness to work in partnership with other agencies were also more likely to participate in the follow-up interviews. This suggests that awareness initiatives need to be targeted principally to those sectors who have not yet introduced interventions, show little change in attitude or are reluctant to consider working in partnership with other groups.

Interventions can be classified as Primary (reducing stress at source), Secondary (identifying early signs of workplace stress and assisting individuals to deal more effectively with pressures at work) and Tertiary (limiting the impact of established cases of workplace stress by helping people cope and recover from stress related problems at work). In broad terms most initiatives used by large companies came under the umbrella of Primary Level Interventions (42.2% of initiatives cited). Of those initiatives used by medium and small companies, 41% (medium) and 57.2% (small) were Secondary Level interventions. Overall Tertiary Level initiatives were less commonly used with 12.2% of those used by small companies, 24.6% of those used by medium companies, and 25.3% of those used by large organisations.

However, across the range of company size, companies preferred to use a number of initiatives rather than just a single initiative to address workplace stress. The cluster of preferred initiatives favoured by companies were stress awareness initiatives and, counselling or EAP support. Few companies reported using audits, and just under a third had used employee participation initiatives or sought help from health professionals.

Most companies who had introduced initiatives to reduce workplace stress, had only implemented these within the last two years. The majority of employers felt it was too early to perform formal evaluations of their interventions, but most expressed an intention to do this in the future. Companies had not performed cost-benefit analyses and were often unsure how to approach this in relation to initiatives to reduce work-related stress.

### *Conclusions*

Overall, the results confirm that workplace stress is considered an important and legitimate health and safety issue. Whilst companies of all sizes, across all sectors have introduced a range of initiatives to tackle the problem, there is no clear framework for action. In general, the benefits and associated costs of these interventions have not been evaluated.

The results emphasised the wide variety of factors that can influence response to stress in the workplace and that organisations act on many cues without necessarily having a structure or framework on which to act, and to facilitate later evaluation. It appears that providing more structured guidance on risk factors, and a practical risk management approach would help in producing a more consistent response to workplace stress. It is important that the education



process supporting this initiative should take into account the complex range of trigger factors which promote companies to act.

*Relevance to future strategy*

As 40% of respondents were currently unaware of any available resources to tackle work-related stress, it would seem that awareness raising and provision of information on suitable resources was an important first step. As there is a lack of consistency and clarity in how to tackle workplace stress, then it is important to develop clear, agreed standards of management practice.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The 1995 Health and Safety Executive (HSE) survey of self-reported work-related illness indicated that more than half a million individuals were suffering from stress or a stress-related disorder caused or made worse by work. Recent government papers such as 'Our Healthier Nation – A Contract for Health' (1998), 'Towards a Healthier Scotland' (1999) and 'Better Health, Better Wales' (1998) have highlighted the important role of the workplace in preventing ill health and promoting healthy lifestyles. Workplace mental health is highlighted as a key issue. The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) places responsibilities on employers for both the physical and psychological well being of employees and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) place a duty on employers to assess and control risks to health from workplace activities. However, to date no specific legislation exists which seeks to control workplace stress or control the risks of psychological ill health in the workplace.

HSE defines work-related stress as the adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them; it arises when they feel they cannot cope. It often involves physical and behavioural effects which, if prolonged or intense, can lead to psychological and physical ill health. HSE makes a clear distinction between external pressures or demands and stress itself.

HSE has launched initiatives aimed at addressing this issue and providing more comprehensive data on the scale of the problem. The results of the public consultation exercise on 'Managing Stress at Work' concluded that work-related stress is a serious problem and a health and safety issue which can be tackled in part through legislation. The HSE plans to launch a campaign to promote work-related stress as a legitimate health and safety issue and provide practical advice to employers. The HSE will also work together with partners to develop clear, agreed standards of good management practice for a range of stressors. In light of this work HSE will also seek to provide information on good practice and risk assessment for HSE Inspectors and local authority officers to better equip them in their role of advising industry.

It is recognised that there is a specific need for better information on the attitude and response to work-related stress from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). The study by Kelly *et al* (1998) showed that customer demands, workload and time pressures, future uncertainties, new ways of working, re-structuring, and people-related issues were seen as potential sources of stress for small businesses. The authors also suggest that effective risk communication is essential to enable businesses of all sizes to address work-related stress effectively. Key factors include participation, involvement and ownership by the target audience. This challenges the suggestion by Daniels (1996) that managers lacked interest in managing work-related stress.

In addressing the issue of work-related stress, an integrated risk management approach has been advocated (Cox, 1993). This approach is further developed in the recent HSC Discussion Document 'Managing Stress at Work'. The IOM have developed a risk assessment approach for occupational stress (Butler *et al*, 1996) on behalf of the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS), and this approach has recently been evaluated on behalf of HEBS and HSE (Lancaster *et al*, 1999). Whilst the risk assessment approach has principally been applied in larger organisations, a tool has been developed which is suitable for data collection from smaller enterprises, and the evaluation methodology is appropriate for organisations of all sizes.

This recent evaluation also identified a number of barriers within organisations to addressing work-related stress and aspects of good practice. This information was used in planning the survey and the design of the survey questionnaires.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The aims of the study were as follows:

1. To evaluate employers' attitudes towards work-related stress as a legitimate health and safety issue.
2. To establish whether employers are taking or have taken action to reduce the risk of work-related stress.
3. To establish whether employers regularly review the actions they have taken in the management of work-related stress.

Whilst the study included all main industry sectors, it was designed to ensure that data were obtained especially from SMEs, whose views are often under-represented in this field. Within this report small businesses are defined as those employing less than 50 people, and medium firms employing between 50 and 250 employees. The HSE definition of work-related stress was applied when discussing the study with participants.



### **3. SUMMARY OF RELEVANT DATA**

The following section provides a summary of recent exercises or research into stress or workplace health issues. It provides further background on how organisations view stress and related health issues and the measures which they are prepared to consider to deal with these issues. The data provide a useful basis for comparison of the factors considered in this survey.

#### **3.1 HSE DISCUSSION DOCUMENT ON MANAGING STRESS AT WORK**

The Health and Safety Executive received 845 responses to their discussion document 'Managing Stress at Work'. Seventy three percent of respondents agreed that HSEs definition of stress was useful. Ninety eight percent of respondents thought that more needed to be done to tackle stress. Reasons for action included concerns about the costs to business and the impact on individuals' health as well as legal and ethical issues. The small percentage who answered NO felt that stress was an individual response to pressure and related lifestyle issues and did not think legislative intervention was appropriate.

Ninety four percent of respondents agreed that stress is a health & safety issue (i.e. should be dealt with by HSC/E and local authorities under Health and Safety Law). Respondents felt that a proactive approach should be adopted through good work design and management practices. Many respondents felt that stress should be managed holistically as it was not possible to adequately separate work stress from non-work stress. The value of occupational health support was recognised. Respondents recognised the need for multidisciplinary input, that the government needed to tackle relevant socio-economic factors, that regulators had a responsibility for information, training and enforcement. Respondents emphasised that employers needed to assess risk adequately, but that employees had a responsibility for their own health.

There was no clear consensus on what action (regulatory or otherwise) should be taken to reduce stress in the workplace. There was much support for HSEs proposed campaign to educate employers on good practice and measures to prevent impacts of stress at work. Sixty nine percent of respondents thought that the ACoP outlined in the discussion document would be worthwhile and the proportion of employers and employees favouring this approach was about equal. There were concerns about ensuring that the ACoP was enforceable.

A partnership approach was also welcomed although it was felt that this should complement regulatory action and not be a substitute for it.

#### **3.2 BRISTOL STRESS AND HEALTH AT WORK STUDY**

Smith *et al* (2000) published findings of a study of occupational stress. Seventeen thousand randomly selected people from the Bristol electoral register were sent a detailed questionnaire, and a response rate of 49% was accrued. One in 5 respondents reported they were 'very' or 'extremely' stressed at work. Only 1 in 10 reported high levels of non-work-related stress. Twenty three percent reported that, in the previous 12 months, they had experienced an illness caused or made worse by work. Perceived stress at work was associated with reports of long working hours, high workload and lack of support.

High occupational stress was also strongly related to a number of health outcomes (as measured by different instruments), including: chronic ill-health conditions, symptoms over the last 12 months and with the use of prescribed medication. High occupational stress was

also strongly related to a number of health-related behaviours, such as number of hours of sleep during weekdays.

A second mailing to 4673 participants who had agreed to be contacted again took place approximately 12 months later. Participants were also recruited to the laboratory phase of the study.

Approximately 18% of those working at the time of the second mailing indicated that their occupational stress was at levels described as 'very' or 'extremely stressful'. Analyses of change scores between the first and second mailings suggested that the effects of high job stress upon acute gastro-intestinal symptoms, fatigue, tension, depression and anxiety, as well as a number of other symptoms were robust.

The results also indicated that certain work characteristics were significantly associated with work stress, including work issues that interfered strongly with family life. Analyses revealed that work stress was significantly associated with sick leave, GP visits and accidents. The results also indicated that the effects of work stress were to a large degree independent from those of general life stress as measured by this questionnaire.

The laboratory cohort study involved approximately 200 people. This compared a group of people identified as work 'stressed' at both time points, and a group of randomly selected respondents from the remaining pool of participants, excluding those who had 'high' work stress. Many of the associations between stress and health remained even after controlling for the possible confounding influence of negative affectivity.

### **3.3 GOOD HEALTH IS GOOD BUSINESS CAMPAIGN (GHGB)**

The Health and Safety Executive have led a number of campaigns on specific health issues as part of the GHGB campaign. The impact of this campaign on attitudes and behaviours of organisations was evaluated in 1999 by a telephone survey of 1,900 employees, with face-to-face interviews with 120 employees to examine specific improvements prompted by the campaign.

'Aware' organisations were classed as those who could either recall the GHGB catch-phrase, or had attended a GHGB event, received literature or an inspectors' visit.

Only 28% of small organisations could recall receiving literature compared to 73% of large organisations.

Sixty six percent of large organisations surveyed had personnel with a health and safety job title compared with 5.6% of small organisations (33% aware -v- 9% unaware had health and safety personnel).

Both 'aware' and 'unaware' organisations rated occupational health as very important. All organisations reported reasonable to significant improvements in health risk management although 'aware' organisations were more likely to have implemented advocated methods such as risk assessment and audits. These changes were prompted in the main by an improved understanding of how to manage health risks. Interestingly most perceived that ill-health had minimal costs for their organisation.

Thirty eight percent of 'aware' and 50% of 'unaware' organisations felt that their arrangements were already good enough, but 23% 'aware' (16% 'unaware') would do more if they had a better understanding of health risk management. Specific regulation, fines or other business impacts were also quoted as triggers for action.

Of the organisations receiving contact about the campaign, 33% cited the greatest incentive for change as visits by HSE or EHO. Contact with HSC had led to increased awareness in regulations and health risk management methods in almost 50% of those receiving such a visit. Awareness of health risks, training opportunities and possible legal action were also common responses.





## 4. METHODS

In outline, the methodology involved a telephone interview with a random selection of small to large organisations across the range of industry sectors, using a structured questionnaire. Follow up telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of those organisations who had implemented or evaluated specific initiatives to address work related stress.

### 4.1 SELECTION OF STUDY POPULATION

Dun and Bradstreet databases were used to identify organisations within each industry sector, and the selection process ensured a wide geographical response. A stratified sampling method was used based on equal numbers from each industry sector with small and medium enterprises being selected on a 4:1 basis compared with large organisations. The stratified sample was therefore in the ratio 2:2:1 for small, medium and large organisations respectively, selected to have equal numbers from each industry sector within each size group.

SMEs now make up over 99% of British industry, and the selection process took account of this. However, on balance, it was acknowledged that large organisations were likely to have implemented more measures to address work-related stress and data on evaluation was likely to be restricted to this group. It was therefore important to ensure that sufficient large organisations were included to obtain information on a range of appropriate interventions.

#### *Sample size*

A total of 1600 companies were contacted, aiming to select 160 from each of ten industry sectors (see below) and planned to include 1280 SMEs and 320 large organisations. The target sample was the total number of companies to be contacted in the first stage of the study. By contacting 1600 companies, it was hoped that we would achieve between 480 and 800 responses to the survey, assuming a response rate of between 30 and 50%. This would allow us to estimate proportions of companies giving positive replies to specific questions or groups of questions on the questionnaire to a precision of around  $\sqrt{0.05}$  of the true value.

The distribution of the target sample is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Target number of companies to be selected by industry sector and size**

<b>Industry sector</b>	<b>Small</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Large</b>	<b>Total</b>
Agriculture, fisheries, forestry	64	64	32	160
Manufacturing	64	64	32	160
Construction	64	64	32	160
Retail & Services	64	64	32	160
Financial	64	64	32	160
Transport	64	64	32	160
Emergency services	64	64	32	160
Education	64	64	32	160
Health Care	64	64	32	160
Local Government	64	64	32	160
<b>Total</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>1600</b>

Previous postal surveys of companies carried out by the IOM have resulted in response rates of around 30%, typical for surveys of this type. We aimed to maximise response by writing to the companies prior to the telephone survey and, where necessary, making a preliminary telephone call to arrange a convenient interview time. These measures and a telephone based survey increased the response rate by half as much again, to 46%.

### *Sample selection*

Organisations were selected from national databases covering the main industry sectors. Experience from previous evaluation studies suggested that the database held by Dun and Bradstreet provided the most suitable coverage of the main industrial and service based sectors. The industry sectors included agriculture, fisheries and forestry, manufacturing, construction, retail, financial, services, transport, emergency services, education, health care and local government.

These commercial databases have the advantage of providing details of industry sector and size of organisation. Sampling across all sectors was performed using the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC 92). The accuracy of classification was also verified when contacting the companies. The most senior person within the personnel department was sought as the main telephone contact.

## **4.2 CONDUCT OF TELEPHONE SURVEY**

Given the overall timescale required for the survey, it was considered that telephone interviews would provide the most cost-effective means of data collection. Also telephone assisted personal interviews (TAPI) generally have improved response ratios compared with postal questionnaire studies. MORI were employed to conduct the telephone interviews, using a structured computerised questionnaire designed by the IOM team. Where the initial interview suggested that companies had introduced specific interventions for work-related stress or had evaluated such initiatives, a further telephone interview was conducted by an IOM Chartered occupational psychologist to obtain further details of these initiatives, with a random sample of those companies willing to participate in this second stage.

In order to be able to locate the relevant company contact at the time of the initial telephone call, and to ensure their availability, a letter was sent to all companies selected from the commercial database prior to commencement of the telephone survey. This provided information about the nature and timescale for the survey and the type of information which would be requested. A fax-back form was included to allow them to provide consent to participate and details of the most convenient time to be contacted.

Prior to the full telephone interview MORI conducted a verification process of the contact details from the sample data supplied by Dun and Bradstreet. Each of the companies was contacted by telephone to verify that the named contact was the person with responsibility for personnel and that the allocated business sector and company size were correct. Where necessary the details on the data file were amended. The process was a useful preparation to the main interview and ensured that the contact name, company sector and company size data were accurate. In the preliminary contact the most appropriate person to interview was identified. The most common positions held were Health and Safety officers/advisors (for around 20% of companies), company directors, chairmen, chief executives (18%), owners (12%) and managers (10%).

The nature of the survey was discussed with the survey unit from MORI who performed the telephone interviews. The information given to MORI included a short introduction to the purpose of the survey and the role of the IOM and HSE. The MORI team attended a briefing

session held by the IOM team, where each aspect of the questionnaire was reviewed and potential responses considered. The MORI team had opportunity to seek clarification on any specific issues and to discuss the purpose of the survey in more detail. They were also asked to give assurance to the company contact, that the information provided by participants would be treated in confidence, and that participating companies would not be named within the IOM report. This information was read to the company contact at the start of each interview. The HSE definition of work-related stress was used in all communication with participating companies.

A small pilot study was carried out of around 20 companies (including small, medium and large organisations) prior to the commencement of the full survey. This aimed to ensure that the process was clear and consistent and the questions structured in such a way as to maximise the amount of relevant information which could be collected over a short timescale (maximum 10 minutes per interview). Three members of the IOM project team attended the pilot study to observe the process and to help MORI staff clarify any points arising during the interviews. The pilot study also provided an opportunity for the members of the IOM team to listen to the interview process and to ensure that responses were correctly recorded and the routing of questions proceeded as planned.

### **4.3 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT**

A computerised questionnaire was developed by the IOM team and administered by MORI.

The questionnaire was designed to ensure that most questions required respondents to select one answer from a selection of responses, and the interviewer then entered this choice on a response grid designed for each question. It was considered that this method provided the most consistent and cost-effective means of collecting relevant data, whilst ensuring ease of analysis and providing a baseline measure against which the success of the HSE campaign and future interventions can be assessed.

The IOM's recent evaluation of the response to the use of a risk assessment tool for stress within large organisations (Lancaster *et al*, 1999) provided useful information on current perceptions of work-related stress, barriers to addressing work-related stress, types of intervention most commonly applied and approaches to evaluating these interventions. This data formed the basis of the questionnaire, and the report by Kelly *et al* (1998) provided additional information relevant to SMEs. The authors found that customer demands, workload and time pressures, future uncertainties, new ways of working, restructuring and people-related issues were seen as potential sources of stress for small businesses. These findings mirror the concerns expressed by employers and employees within larger companies, based on the research performed by the IOM, and were included in the questionnaire for this study.

The questionnaire included a brief assessment of the economic climate in which the company is operating, and the nature of any changes which have taken place such as mergers, down-sizing or restructuring. Change and uncertainty are known to have an impact on levels of workplace stress, and may influence companies attitudes towards workplace stress.

The company contact was asked about perceived levels of workplace stress and whether there are any indicators such as sickness absence, staff turnover or morale. The company contact was asked whether stress is considered a health and safety issue, and whether the employer considers that work-related stress is principally their responsibility. The questionnaire also enquired about the existence of a stress or mental health policy, or other procedures to address work-related stress. The recent IOM evaluation (Lancaster *et al*, 1999) found that commitment by senior management was essential to the introduction of stress reduction

initiatives. The company contact was asked whether attitudes to work-related stress had changed within the last two years, and what factors had been associated with any change in attitude.

The company contact was asked whether any specific interventions had been introduced to address stress in the workplace, and if so, what were the main trigger factors for these initiatives. A number of likely interventions were anticipated such as health education campaigns, stress awareness courses, provision of relevant information or training, use of occupational health and related services such as employees assistance programmes or counselling. Where interventions had not been introduced, information was sought on barriers or obstacles that might exist within the company in relation to addressing issues associated with work-related stress. The contact was also asked whether they favoured a risk management approach for work-related stress.

Information was sought on awareness of available local or national resources to assist the company in addressing work-related stress and to assess commitment to partnership initiatives with the various agencies available. It was also intended to allow confirmation of HSE's proposed code of practice as the most appropriate way forward for addressing work-related stress.

#### **4.4 SELECTION FOR FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS**

Companies were identified as eligible for the follow-up interviews if they had both taken specific steps to reduce workplace stress and were also willing for the IOM to contact them again. The objectives of the follow-up interviews were to elicit more in-depth information about the interventions used, including issues, such as, motivating factors, evaluations of initiatives used and related issues. Given the time permitted for the follow-up it was agreed that 100 interviews would be carried out. It was planned to carry out the 100 follow-up interviews, evenly divided among the company size categories. A random sample of the eligible companies, stratified by company size, was therefore selected for follow-up interviews. The target sample comprised 33 small companies (< 50 employees), 34 medium companies (50-250 employees) and 33 large companies (> 250 employees). When the final sample of 100 companies had been identified, the sample was examined to ensure that there was a reasonable distribution of industry sectors in each size range.

A small pilot study of ten follow-up interviews was completed before the random sample was selected. This was done to allow the development of the structured follow-up interview to be completed and tested while the data processing and validation of the information from the first round of telephone interviews was being completed. The random sample was examined to ensure that all companies contacted as part of the pilot study were included. Where this was not the case a company of the same size, and in the same industry sector, was omitted from the random sample and replaced by the relevant pilot study company.

The aim of the follow-up was to achieve a total of 100 interviews. If a company could not be contacted, or refused to take part, it was replaced by another company selected randomly from eligible companies in the same size and sector groups.

#### **4.5 FORMAT OF FOLLOW- UP INTERVIEWS**

A more detailed follow-up telephone interview was conducted by an IOM Chartered occupational psychologist with those companies who were willing to participate in a further interview and who had introduced specific interventions, or sought to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions. A date and time for this follow-up interview was

arranged in advance at the time of the initial interview. At the start of the follow-up interview all participants were reminded of the purposes of the study and were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they wished.

One hundred follow-up telephone interviews took place, 33 from small organisations, 34 from medium companies and 33 from large companies. This follow-up interview covered the following areas:

- Trigger factors influencing decision to introduce interventions;
- How organisations made the decision about interventions used;
- What was done – interventions/initiatives, tools used;
- Outcomes, measures of impact and effectiveness of interventions used (including type of evaluation carried out).

It was anticipated that little information would be available on cost-benefits of the interventions used, although information was sought on the approximate costs of the interventions and perceived costs of stress to the organisation.

Due to the specific objectives of the study and the required timescale, data were not sought on employee attitudes to work-related stress.

The use of follow-up telephone interviews enabled more in-depth information to be gained about the drives for introducing interventions, what approaches were taken and how organisations are evaluating the interventions. This data should help to establish the actions employers have and are taking to reduce workplace stress and to discover if employers regularly review the steps, actions and processes they are putting in place to tackle workplace stress.

A copy of the follow-up interview structure is given in Appendix 1. The use of open and closed questions enabled the interviewer to gather detailed information within a tight 10 –15 minute interview timescale.



## **5. DATA ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 DATA COLLECTION**

Questionnaire data were returned to the IOM by MORI in *SPSS* database format and also as *Microsoft Excel* files. Some data processing and data verification was carried out using the Excel data files. These files were subsequently converted to Minitab work (.MTW) files for further data verification and for data analysis (see section 5.2).

Liaison with Dun and Bradstreet to obtain the sample files of UK businesses was undertaken by MORI using standard protocols to ensure effective and secure methods of data exchange. The sample data supplied by Dun and Bradstreet was subsequently checked at the IOM to ensure that the data conformed to the requested specification (see table 1).

The study data files were stored on a *Compaq* Server on the IOM's network running *MS Windows NT4*. The server is located in a physically secure, climate controlled computer room to which access is controlled and limited to IT administration staff. The IOM's standard operating procedures (SOPs) were employed to ensure the security and integrity of all computerised data. These include daily backup procedures, active protection from the threat of computer virus infection and prevention of unauthorised access to any study data. The project was run in full compliance with the Data Protection Act including the recent 1998 Act. Access to all study data was restricted to members of the IOM project team and IOM IT administration staff.

The data were checked for logical consistency, valid values, valid ranges and cross record consistency. Other data checks were carried out as required, during the development of the project. As required, MORI were asked for assistance with verification or clarification of any data inconsistencies.

Issues involving the data collection, data processing and systems design were primarily controlled by the project's systems analyst who was responsible for reviewing any other data related issues as appropriate to the requirements of the project.

### **5.2 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS**

Within the short timescale of this study, results and conclusions were based principally on data descriptions, subclassified by the three organisational size ranges (small, medium and large organisations) and, separately, by industry sector

Data are described using tabular and graphical methods as appropriate, using the facilities of the statistical software package Minitab (Minitab Inc, 1997).

Results from the main company questionnaire interviews were used to describe the employers' attitudes towards stress and any actions they are taking to reduce the risk of stress; highlighting any differences by size of company or by industry sector. The more detailed information gathered by the follow-up telephone call to companies where initiatives have been implemented are described in relation to the replies to the main questionnaire and to industry sector and size.





## 6. RESULTS OF TELEPHONE SURVEY

### 6.1 STUDY SAMPLE

A target sample of 1600 companies was identified from the Dun and Bradstreet companies' database. The sample was designed to include proportionally more small and medium sized companies (SMEs) than large companies. This was done because information on stress at work in SMEs was a specific focus of the current study and also because a lower response rate was expected from these companies.

It was intended that the target sample should comprise 64 small, 64 medium and 32 large companies from each of the ten industry sectors to be studied. These targets were met for all sectors except Emergency Service organisations, for which it did not prove possible to identify sufficient small and medium enterprises (41 identified compared to a target of 128). Numbers in the other categories were increased to maintain a total target sample of 1600 companies, and their distribution is shown in Table 6.1. In each of the nine sectors (excluding the Emergency Services) 67 or 68 small companies, 66 to 68 medium companies and 35 large companies were identified.

**Table 6.1**  
**Distribution of the target sample (N), and study participants (n), by industry sector and company size. Percentage of the target sample who participated is shown in italics.**

Industry sector	Company size									Total		
	<50			50-250			>250					
	N	n	%	N	n	%	N	n	%	N	n	%
Agriculture	67	35	<i>52</i>	66	15	<i>23</i>	35	7	<i>20</i>	168	57	<i>34</i>
Manufacturing	68	33	<i>49</i>	67	23	<i>34</i>	35	21	<i>60</i>	170	77	<i>45</i>
Construction	67	31	<i>46</i>	67	22	<i>33</i>	35	14	<i>40</i>	169	67	<i>40</i>
Retail/Services	68	98	<i>144</i>	67	44	<i>66</i>	35	27	<i>77</i>	170	169	<i>99</i>
Finance	67	27	<i>40</i>	67	19	<i>28</i>	35	23	<i>66</i>	169	69	<i>41</i>
Transport	68	27	<i>40</i>	67	17	<i>25</i>	35	13	<i>37</i>	170	57	<i>34</i>
Emergency Servs.	32	4	<i>13</i>	9	4	<i>44</i>	35	15	<i>43</i>	76	23	<i>30</i>
Education	67	24	<i>36</i>	67	26	<i>39</i>	35	12	<i>34</i>	169	62	<i>37</i>
Health Care	67	47	<i>70</i>	68	26	<i>38</i>	35	16	<i>46</i>	170	89	<i>52</i>
Local Govn	67	13	<i>19</i>	67	10	<i>15</i>	35	30	<i>86</i>	169	53	<i>31</i>
Total	638	339	<i>53</i>	612	206	<i>34</i>	350	178	<i>51</i>	1600	723	<i>45</i>

The number of respondents and the corresponding response rates are shown for each size/sector combination. Those who did not participate in the survey may have refused to do so, or there may have been problems re-contacting specific individuals within the timescale of the telephone survey.

The company size and sector was validated during the telephone interview, and in some cases these factors, as recorded at interview, differed from those in the business database. The final study sample is classified according to the corrected classification and so, for example, 98 small retail businesses were recorded as answering the questionnaire, when there were only 68 due to be contacted. It is most accurate therefore to consider the breakdown of the 1600 companies as the target number to be interviewed in each category, and the questionnaire responders as the number actually achieved.

The achieved response rate was lowest for medium sized companies and, unexpectedly, was no higher in large companies than in small companies. This may be due in part to the reclassification of size during the interviews. Response for the retail/service sector was substantially higher than among the other sectors, with relatively low response (<35%) apparent for agriculture, transport, emergency services and local government. Particularly low response ( $\leq 20\%$ ) was achieved for large agriculture, small emergency services and small and medium local government organisations.

The sections below describe the responses to the telephone questionnaire and identify the key results and trends in the data. Detailed tables of frequencies of responses are given in the Appendices. Appendix 1 shows the overall frequency of responses to each question, Appendix 2 shows the breakdown of key responses by company size and Appendix 3 shows the breakdown of key responses by company sector.

## 6.2 PERCEPTION AND LEVELS OF STRESS

After determination of company size and sector (questions 1 and 2), the first section of the questionnaire (questions 3,4 and 5) concerned the companies' overall perception of stress as a work-related issue, the presence and level of stress in the specific company and the causes and effects of stress in the workplace. Table 6.2 shows the number of respondents who consider that stress can cause work-related illness and the number who report that workplace stress is a problem for their company. For those for whom workplace stress is a problem, the table shows whether the levels of stress were thought to be increasing, decreasing or unchanged.

**Table 6.2**  
**Distribution of perception of work-related stress, frequency of occurrence and changes in level of occurrence. Each cell contains number of companies.**

Is workplace stress a problem for your company?	Does your company consider that stress can cause work-related illness?		Total
	No	Yes	
No	79	447	526
Yes	13	184	197
<i>Levels over past 12 months:</i>			
<i>increased</i>	9	114	123
<i>decreased</i>	1	5	6
<i>unchanged</i>	3	65	68
Total	92	631	723

A large majority of those surveyed (631; 87%) felt that stress can cause work-related illness, although only 197 (27%) said that it was a problem for their own company. Proportionally twice as many of those who think stress causes work-related illness reported a problem in their own company (184 of 631 respondents, 29%) than those who did not think stress can cause work-related illness (13 of 92 respondents, 14%).

Of companies with stress problems, 62% reported that levels of stress had increased in the past 12 months, compared to 35% where levels had remained the same and only 3% where levels appeared to be decreasing. These proportions did not differ between those companies who do and those who do not perceive stress to cause work-related illness.

Where work-related stress occurs in a company it can affect staff attitudes and morale. Table 6.3 compares the frequencies of the effects of stress between those companies who think they have a problem with work-related stress and those companies who do not. Overall only 20% of companies not reporting problems with workplace stress reported any effects compared to 70% of companies reporting problems with workplace stress. The most commonly reported effect was lower staff morale, reported by almost half of the companies with workplace stress and 15% who did not consider stress a problem to them. All of the effects of stress were reported more frequently by companies reporting work-related stress than by companies who did not think work-related stress was a problem for them.

**Table 6.3**  
**Frequency of effects of work-related stress for companies with and without problems with work-related stress. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of companies reporting each effect.**

<b>Are you aware of any of the following occurring in the last 12 months?</b>	<b>Is workplace stress a problem for your company?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Increased staff absences	68	34	52	10	120 17
Increased staff turnover	50	25	53	10	103 14
Lower staff morale	96	49	80	15	176 24
Increased reports of stress	72	37	35	7	107 15
None of these	60	30	374	71	434 60

Further analysis of companies who think that work-related stress is a problem for them showed that effects of stress were reported by 80% of those companies where levels of stress had increased over the past 12 months, compared to 33% of the six companies where stress level had decreased and 51% of the companies where levels had remained unchanged. Over 60% of companies with increasing stress levels reported lower staff morale.

Major changes in a companies' ways of working or workload would be expected to cause more work-related stress among the workers. Table 6.4 shows the frequencies of a number of potential causes of work-related stress, for companies with and without a problem with work-related stress.

**Table 6.4**  
**Frequency of causes of work-related stress for companies with and without problems with work-related stress. Each cell contains number of companies reporting each issue *and percentage of row total*.**

<b>Have any of the following occurred in your company in the last 12 months?</b>	<b>Is workplace stress a problem for your company?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Restructuring	104	35	195	65	299
Merger	40	40	60	60	100
Changes in job security	65	45	80	55	145
Introduction of new technology	94	31	214	69	308
More flexible working roles	63	32	132	68	195
Increased workload	128	38	209	62	337
Outsourcing of functions	57	39	90	61	147
None of these	18	12	134	88	152

Companies in which a merger or changes in job security had taken place were most likely to report that workplace stress was a problem, followed closely by companies with increased workload, outsourcing of functions and restructuring. As expected companies where none of the issues had occurred were least likely to report workplace stress as a problem.

As expected, more companies reporting a stress problem reported one or more of the potential causes of stress (91% compared to 75% among companies who did not consider they had a problem with stress). The most commonly reported cause was increased workload, followed by company restructuring and the introduction of new technology.

Analysis by workplace size (details in Appendix 2) showed that the proportion of companies reporting problems with work-related stress increased as company size increased (Table A2.1), although SMEs were more likely than large companies to see an increase in levels of stress in the last 12 months. Results of stress (lower staff morale etc) were seen more often in medium and large companies than small companies (Table A2.2) and the frequency of causes of stress (restructuring, merger etc) increased with increasing company size (Table A2.3).

Comparisons across industry sectors (details in Appendix 3) showed that the Emergency Services (65%) and Local Government organisations (55%) were most likely to report problems with work-related stress (Table A3.2). Only around 20% of Agriculture and Manufacturing companies reported problems with work-related stress, but of these over 80% reported that levels of stress had increased over the past 12 months. In contrast for the Emergency Services, where overall levels of stress were high, less than half reported an increase in stress levels (Table A3.3).

As well as reporting the highest proportions of problems with work-related stress, the Emergency Services and Local Government organisations were the most likely to report the results of stress, particularly lower staff morale (Table A3.4). All of the participating Emergency Service organisations and 94% of Local Government organisations also reported at least one of the potential causes of workplace stress (Table A3.5). In the Emergency Services sector 70% or more companies reported restructuring, introduction of new technology and increased workload, while more than 70% of Local Government organisations reported increased workload. Retail and Services companies were least likely to report any of the effects of stress (Table A3.4), while causes of stress were least likely to be reported by companies in the Transport, Retail and Services and Health Care sectors (Table A3.5).

### **6.3 STRESS AS A HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUE**

The second section of the questionnaire (questions 6 to 9) considered the Health and Safety aspects of stress in the workplace, in particular policies for addressing stress, responsibility for dealing with stress and company attitudes towards stress. Table 6.5 summarises company opinions on stress as a Health and Safety Issue and who is felt to be most responsible for tackling work-related stress.

**Table 6.5**  
**Distribution of companies by opinion on stress as a Health and Safety Issue and responsibilities for tackling work-related stress. Each cell contains number of companies and percentage of column total.**

In your company would tackling workplace stress be mainly the responsibility of...	Does your company think that stress should be controlled in the same way as other workplace H&S issues?				Total	
	Yes		No			
The employer	463	82	98	63	561	78
The employee	33	6	31	20	64	9
Neither	72	13	26	17	98	14
Total	568	100	155	100	723	100

Of the companies surveyed, 568 (79%) felt that stress should be controlled in the same way as other Health and Safety issues. Almost 80% felt that tackling workplace stress was the responsibility of the employer, this proportion being higher among the companies controlling stress as an H&S issue (82% compared to 63% who did not treat stress as an H&S issue). Ninety-eight companies thought that tackling stress was neither the responsibility of the employer nor the employee.

Only 159 (22%) of companies had a written policy to address stress related problems and the majority of these policies (144; 91%) had been integrated as part of the Health and Safety policy and systems. Of the 564 companies without a written policy, 202 (36%) intended to develop a policy over the next 12 months, while 362 companies had no intention of developing a written policy in that timescale.

Attitudes towards stress had changed in 360 (50%) companies over the last two years. The factor most commonly associated with a change in attitude was raised awareness due to media coverage (Table 6.6), followed by a more sympathetic approach from management and feedback from employees.

**Table 6.6**  
**Frequency of reporting of factors associated with a change in attitude towards stress. Each cell contains number of companies and percentage of 358 companies which reported a change in attitude and responded to this question.**

Factor	Companies	
	No.	%
More sympathetic approach from management	207	58
Concerns about cost of litigation	118	33
Raised awareness due to media coverage	224	63
Raised awareness due to HSE initiatives	149	42
Feedback from employees	184	51
Other factors	41	11

There were few differences between companies of different sizes in the allocation of responsibility for tackling workplace stress, although slightly more small companies felt it was neither the responsibility of the employer nor the employee. There was an increasing trend in changes in attitudes towards stress across industry size. As industry size increases, the percentage of companies in which attitudes towards stress had changed over the last 2 years increases from 37% in small companies to 54% in medium companies and 68% in large companies. Large companies were also more likely to report all factors associated with a change in attitude to stress than SMEs (Table A2.4). Small companies were the least likely to report each factor.

As industry size increases, the percentage of companies who have a written policy to address stress related problems also increases (9% in small companies, followed by 27% in medium sized companies and 40% in large companies). The percentage of companies who do not have a written policy to address stress related problems but who are likely to develop one within the next 12 months also increases rapidly as industry size increases (21% in small companies, followed by 48% in medium sized companies and 60% in large companies).

Responsibility for tackling workplace stress was fairly even distributed across industry sector, although there was some evidence (based on relatively small numbers) that companies in the Agriculture sector were more likely to see it as the responsibility of the employee (Table A3.8).

Attitudes towards stress were more likely to have changed in the Emergency Services (74%), Local Government (72%), Education (61%) and Agriculture (58%) sectors (Table A3.9). In all sectors changed attitudes were most likely to be associated with a more sympathetic approach from management and raised awareness due to media coverage. For the Emergency Services, feedback from employees was also important, and this sector (and to a lesser extent Construction and Educational organisations) was more likely to report an association with raised awareness due to HSE initiatives (Table A3.10).

The Emergency Services were also the sector most likely either to have a written policy to address stress (51%) or to be planning to develop one in the next 12 months (43%).

## 6.4 METHODS FOR DEALING WITH STRESS

The final section of the questionnaire addressed companies' awareness of resources to address stress and identified methods which would help them to address stress more effectively. Table 6.7 shows the distribution of companies according to whether or not they are currently aware of resources to address work-related stress, and what resources they feel would help them to address workplace stress more effectively.

**Table 6.7**  
**Distribution of companies' awareness and opinions of resources for addressing work-related stress. Each cell contains number and percentage of companies who felt that each resource would be helpful to them.**

Which of the following would help your company to address work-related stress more effectively?	Are you aware of any resources to address work-related stress?				Total	
	Yes		No			
HSE code of practice/legislation	230	55	116	39	346	48
Support from specialist groups	200	47	103	34	303	42
Simple risk assessment tools	220	52	121	40	341	47
Stress awareness campaigns	215	51	115	38	330	46
More printed information	202	48	133	44	335	46
IT based self-help packages	138	33	75	25	213	29
Training for line management	292	69	125	42	417	58
More staff and resources	173	41	92	31	265	37
Other	27	6	58	19	85	12
None of these	1	0	2	1	3	0

Of the 723 respondents, 422 (58%) were aware of resources to address work-related stress. All except three of the companies felt that at least one of the suggested resources would help them to address work-related stress more effectively. Companies, which were currently

unaware of the available resources, were less likely to feel that any of the suggested resources would be helpful, than companies which were already aware of resources. However 19% of companies unaware of current resources suggested ‘other’ helpful resources, compared to only 6% of aware companies. Appropriate training for line management and supervisors was seen as the most important resource, particularly among companies already aware of resources. IT based self-help packages were the least popular among both groups of companies.

Over half of the companies surveyed (395; 55%) were willing to consider working in partnership with other agencies (health promotion units, larger companies etc). Thirty nine and a half percent of companies (286) had taken steps to reduce workplace stress (95%CI 36% to 43%). If another survey was done of 723 companies in the future, it would have 43% power to detect an increase of 10% from 39.5% to 43.45% and 90% power to detect an increase of 20% from 39.5% to 47.4%.

The steps taken are summarised in Table 6.8, which also shows if these steps have been evaluated by the company.

The most common steps taken to reduce stress were stress awareness initiatives and counselling programmes. Companies who had evaluated the steps they had taken were more likely to have undertaken stress audits and to have had employee participation in focus groups.

The most commonly cited reason for companies not taking steps to reduce workplace stress, was a lack of understanding of how to solve stress-related problems. Lack of resources was the second most common obstacle, followed by a lack of supportive management style, and fear of ‘opening a can of worms’.

**Table 6.8**  
**Distribution of steps taken to reduce workplace stress and the evaluation of these steps. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of the 273 companies who had taken any steps to reduce stress and who were classified according to evaluation (113 who evaluated steps, 160 who did not evaluate steps)\***

Which of the following steps have been taken?	Has your company evaluated the effectiveness of the steps they have taken?				Total	
	Yes		No			
Stress audit	24	21	17	11	41	15
Stress awareness initiatives	55	49	76	48	131	48
Stress policy	52	46	64	40	116	42
Employees in focus groups	47	42	46	29	93	34
Counselling programme	47	42	81	51	128	47
Support from health professionals	34	30	56	35	90	33
Other	26	23	36	23	62	23

*\*13 companies who said they had taken steps to reduce stress, reported that they were taking no action at the moment and so were not asked about evaluation.*

The proportion of companies who reported taking steps to reduce stress increased as company size increased from 28% among small companies to 42% among medium and 58% among large companies. More large companies than SMEs had taken each of the specified steps to reduce workplace stress, and more medium than small companies had a stress policy, counselling programme and offered support from other health professionals (Table A2.6). Of those companies, which had taken steps to reduce stress, more large companies



had evaluated their effectiveness (69%) than medium (53%) or small companies (44%).

Local Government and Emergency Services were the most likely organisations to have taken steps to reduce stress (they also had high levels of stress - Table A3.2), followed by the Education and Health Care sectors (Table A3.16). Relatively few companies from the Construction and Retail and Services sector had taken steps to reduce stress. However, a higher proportion of Retail and Services companies that had taken steps to reduce stress had evaluated the effectiveness of these steps (49%) than in all other sectors except Manufacturing (54%). Stress awareness initiatives and counselling programmes tended to be the best used steps, and stress audits the least used in most of the sectors (Table A3.17).

## **7. RESULTS OF FOLLOW- UP INTERVIEWS**

### **7.1 DATA COLLECTION**

One hundred follow-up telephone interviews were carried out by an Occupational Psychologist with 33 small (<50 employees), 34 medium (50-250 employees) and 33 large (>250 employees) employers. The sample covers a broad range of organisations across the different sizes and sectors of employers.

The follow-up interview explored issues under the following broad headings:

- Trigger factors influencing the decision to introduce interventions;
- How organisations made the decision about interventions used (e.g. sources of help and the level at which decisions were made in the organisation);
- What was done – interventions/initiatives and tools used (also highlighting factors critical to the success of tackling workplace stress);
- Outcomes, measures of impact and effectiveness of interventions used (including type of evaluation carried out, formal and informal).

It was anticipated that little data would be available on cost-benefits of the interventions used, although participants were asked for information about the perceived cost-benefits to the company by tackling workplace stress.

The use of follow-up telephone interviews allowed the occupational psychologist to gain more in-depth information from employers about the drives for introducing interventions, the approaches adopted to tackle workplace stress and how organisations aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. This was used to supplement the data obtained from the initial telephone survey.

The obtained data helped to establish the actions employers had taken or were taking to reduce workplace stress and to discover if employers regularly reviewed the steps, actions and processes they were putting in place to tackle workplace stress.

The data obtained has been analysed and categorised for ease of reporting.

When reporting data they are categorised and analysed in relation to the percentage of the total number of factors reported to help give an indication of their relative importance. In some instances percentage or ranked positions are reported.

### **7.2 SURVEY SAMPLE**

Table 7.1 indicates the distribution of the 100 companies interviewed across company size and sector.

It can be seen that there is a spread of companies across sector and size.

**Table 7.1**  
**Distribution of 100 companies interviewed as part of the follow-up survey by size and sector.**

Industry sector	Company Size			Total
	Small	Medium	Large	
Agriculture	3	4	1	8
Manufacturing	3	2	2	7
Construction	2	2	3	7
Retail & Services	6	5	2	13
Financial	3	2	3	8
Transport	1	3	2	6
Emergency Services	0	2	4	6
Education	5	3	4	12
Health Care	6	7	4	17
Local Government	4	4	8	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>

Companies eligible for follow-up interviews demonstrated the following:

- Almost all companies eligible for follow-up considered that stress can cause work-related illness (96% compared to 84% of companies not eligible).
- Eligible companies were almost twice as likely to say that workplace stress is a problem in their company (40% -v- 22%)
- Eligible companies were more likely to see tackling stress as the responsibility of the employer than ineligible companies (84% -v- 75%)
- In 72% of eligible companies attitudes towards stress had changed in the last 2 years compared to 41% of ineligible companies
- 75% of eligible companies were aware of resources to address workplace stress compared to 52% of ineligible companies
- 77% of eligible companies were willing to work in partnership compared to 46% of ineligible companies

### **7.3 TRIGGER FACTORS INFLUENCING THE INTRODUCTION OF INTERVENTIONS**

The reasons given for introducing interventions (trigger factors) could be classified into a number of broad categories. The percentages of interventions reported by respondents, is given in Table 7.2 (a) (Small Companies), 7.2 (b) (Medium) and 7.2 (c) (Large). Table 7.2 shows the ten most frequently reported factors for company size and examples of the remaining less frequently reported factors.

**Table 7.2**  
**Major trigger factors by company size.**

**(a) Small companies**

<b>Major Trigger Factors/Prompts</b>	<b>%</b>
Increased awareness of effects of stress	16.4
Increased workload and hours worked	15.2
Effects of stress observed at first hand (behaviours, illnesses)	11.4
	10.1
<i>Nature of work done</i>	
Demands/pressures of work (conflict, responsibility, expectations...)	7.6
Senior/Significant staff off on stress-related illness	6.3
Press, magazines, media info	6.3
	5.1
<i>Staff turnover</i>	
HSE, H & S ... info	3.8
Solve a problem – common sense	3.8
Other*e.g. litigation / legislation, increasing sickness/stress, changes, cash flow	14

**(b) Medium companies**

<b>Major Trigger Factors/Prompts</b>	<b>%</b>
Nature of work done	9.6
Increased / high levels of sickness absence	7.7
Increased / high levels of stress	6.7
	6.7
<i>General H &amp; S concerns</i>	
HSE, H & S ... info	6.7
Senior/Significant staff off on stress-related illness	6.7
Changes – IT, restructuring etc.	5.8
	5.8
<i>OH / Welfare / GP raised issue</i>	
Demands/pressures of work (conflict, responsibility, expectations...)	5.8
Legislation	4.8
Other *e.g. turnover, litigation, workload etc	33.7

**(c) Large companies**

<b>Major Trigger Factors/Prompts</b>	<b>%</b>
Increased / high levels of sickness absence	14.2
Increased / high levels of stress	13.2
	12.3
<i>HSE, H &amp; S ... info</i>	
Press, magazines, media info	11.3
General H & S concerns	8.5
Nature of work done	4.7
	4.7
<i>OH / Welfare / GP raised issue</i>	
Legislation	3.8
Litigation	3.8
Increased workload and hours worked	2.8
Other * e.g. demands/ pressures, changes, particular staff problems etc.	20.7

\* The 'other' category contains all the factors outwith the top ten, each of which were reported less frequently

The results indicated a wide range of reasons for organisations to introduce workplace stress measures, especially for medium and large organisations, with at least a third of medium and a fifth of large organisations citing ‘other’ triggers for taking action.

To facilitate comparisons between companies of different size, a summary of the top 5 factors for each of the company size categories is given in Table 7.3 and illustrates differences between the groups in the reasons which prompted them to address stress issues in the workplace.

**Table 7.3**  
**Common Trigger Factors (by company size)**

Company size		
Small	Medium	Large
Increased awareness of effects of stress	Nature of work done	Increased / high levels of sickness absence
Increased workload and hours worked	Increased / high levels of sickness absence	Increased / high levels of stress
Effects of stress observed at first hand (behaviours, illnesses)	Increased / high levels of Stress	HSE, H & S ... info
<i>Nature of work done</i>	General H & S concerns	Press, magazines, media info
Demands/pressures of work (conflict, responsibility, expectations...)	HSE, H & S ... info	General H & S concerns

The major reasons given for small employers to do something centred on the effects of stress (both increased awareness and actual experience of problems), and the nature of work itself (longer hours, increasing demands and workload). These concerns illustrate the importance of practical issues for small organisations as a major factor in deciding to tackle occupational stress.

The medium and large companies cited many reasons for taking action. Note that four out of the top five factors were the same for medium and large companies, though in different order of priority. The factors included organisational indicators of problems such as, increasing sickness absence, increasing stress, being aware of issues by information coming from bodies such as the HSE and other health and safety organisations, as well as from the media and the nature of the job itself.

The factors influencing the decision to introduce workplace stress interventions in different industry sectors were also examined. In the Education and Health sectors a high proportion of companies reported that the nature of the job (dealing with pupils, patients, people), and the increasing workload, demands and hours worked were key factors in deciding to put interventions in place to reduce workplace stress. For most industry sectors, except Transport, Manufacturing, Retail & Services and Agriculture (who viewed being a friendlier and better employer as more important), the increasing publicity by organisations such as HSE and Health and Safety/trade journals and the press were other key factors to taking action. Other factors such as increasing sickness levels, increasing stress levels and prompts from Occupational health and other specialists were also significant triggers for Local Government, Health, Education, Emergency Services, Finance and Construction.

The results emphasise the wide variety of factors that can influence stress in the workplace and how organisations pick up information and cues to act from many avenues without necessarily having a structure or framework to draw things together for later ease of evaluation of impact.

To illustrate some of the motivating factors which help prompt organisations to introduce initiatives some specific examples of why organisations take action are given below:

- ‘HSE, Legislative requirements.’ (Emergency Services, Medium).
- ‘Increase in sickness absence we’re picking up and lost work time’. (Local Government, Large).
- ‘HSE, media.’ (Health, Large).
- ‘Identified stress as a problem in the workplace.’ (Education, Large).
- ‘Lot of people having time off sick.’ (Construction, Medium).
- ‘Had stress as topic in group health and safety meetings.’ (Transport, Large).
- ‘Because in essence have a mentally stressful environment.’ (Agriculture, Small).
- ‘One or two getting too stressed due to workload.’ (Manufacturing, Small).
- ‘Length of exposure – working day length.’ (Construction, Small).
- ‘Overloading staff – try to take on more staff to reduce it.’ (Retail, Small).
- ‘Had a stroke – couldn’t have been anything else but stress of work.’ (Finance, Small).
- ‘Main push – have a lot of people to care for and the nature of the job is very stressful, therefore have to monitor and move away from autocratic management.’ (Health, Medium).
- ‘Changing nature of work, excessive amount of hours worked by people.’ (Retail & Services, Medium).
- ‘Going through a period of major change, stress levels going up.’ (Finance, Medium).

The respondents were also asked whether they were introducing the interventions to help individuals, the organisation or both. All organisations across all sectors of industry felt that the interventions would help both the individuals in the company to cope better in work and ultimately would also help the organisation. Some 21% of small companies primarily felt that stress is more of a personal issue than a work issue, and two companies said that they felt people suffering stress in a job meant that they were not suited to the work and should probably leave. However they nonetheless felt that the consequences would have a negative impact on work and felt that they had to offer some support to the people concerned to help them.

#### **7.4 HOW ORGANISATIONS DECIDE WHICH INTERVENTIONS TO USE**

Two aspects of the decision-making process were examined during the telephone interviews. These were the sources of help used by the different companies in selecting an appropriate intervention strategy and the level within the organisation at which selection decisions were made. Table 7.4 shows the sources of help used by organisations categorised by size. The table presents the percentage of particular factors used when deciding to use interventions reported by respondents – the results are based upon the frequency of reporting.

**Table 7.4**  
**Decision making by size of organisation (% frequency of reported factors)**

How decision is made	Company size					
	Small		Medium		Large	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
General knowledge – self, family, management	1	27.5	5	11.0	4.5	6.8
Information from other sources: HSE, Govt, External Consultants, Unions	2.5	21.0	2	24.1	2	25.7
General discussion with staff	2.5	21.0	4	16.7	4.5	6.8
Advice from OH Unit/Welfare/GP	4	11.3	3	20.4	3	21.6
Programmes/Courses	5.5	4.8	--	--	7	4.0
<i>Information from media</i>	5.5	4.8	6	1.9	6	5.4
Advice from H & S / HR	7	6.4	1	25.9	1	29.7
Other -e.g. needed to do something to cope with growth/downsizing	8	3.2	--	--	--	--

The results indicated that small companies tended to make decisions differently to medium and large organisations. They based decisions more on general knowledge (self and within organisation), discussing options with staff and getting information from other sources of help. They also reported the use of small business advisers, the HSE and others (including external small business consultants/TECs).

In contrast medium and large organisations sought advice from a variety of significant sources as their first step, as opposed to mainly relying on their own (and management) knowledge. Their main sources of information were Health and Safety and Human Resource sources, information provided from the HSE, H & S government and external consultants (more often organisational development and stress specialists), and advice from occupational health and welfare specialists.

Further analyses by industrial sector showed some variation in the sources of help and steps taken before decisions were made on what interventions to use. See Appendix 3.17 for details. Most sectors except Retail & Services and Transport made significant use of the advice from Health and Safety and Human Resource departments. The Retail & Services and Transport sectors were those who placed greatest weight on the use of general knowledge (self and within organisation) when they decided how to address workplace stress issues. Emergency Services and Education placed the advice of occupational health/welfare in first position, whereas Health Care organisations mentioned the use of staff discussions more often than other factors. In Health Care areas companies often reported that they felt they had the professional knowledge and experience to deal with stress in the workplace and supplemented this with general HSE, Health and Safety literature. Industries such as Agriculture, Construction, and Financial Services mentioned that they place importance upon the information they received from sources like the HSE, Government and other external sources of advice as being important in helping them decide how to tackle workplace stress.

When asked who was involved in making the selection decision about interventions used, all large employers, 91% of medium sized employers and 82% of small employers said that decisions about the types of interventions used were taken at Senior Management levels alone (including a range from Owner(s), MD, Chief Executive, Senior HR, Occupational Health and Health and Safety personnel).

Across Manufacturing, Construction, Financial Services, Local Government and Emergency Services industry sectors all final selection implementation decisions were taken at a very senior level (by senior managers, owners, directors). In the other sectors the levels for senior level decision making alone were still high: Health (89%), Education (80%), Transport (83%), Retail & Services (71%) and Agriculture (60%).

The companies where senior managers alone did not make the selection decisions were those where decisions were made by all staff regardless of grade. This suggests a more hands on and participative approach to deciding upon the best ways to tackle workplace stress for their work area (i.e. decisions made by senior level managers in full consultation with employees).

## 7.5 INITIATIVES USED AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS IN TACKLING WORKPLACE STRESS

The results from the general telephone survey indicated that companies were using the following interventions (given in rank order):

- Stress awareness initiatives
- Counselling / EAPs
- Stress Policy
- Employee participation
- Support from other health professionals
- Other
- Stress Audit

In the follow-up interview further information was sought on the ways in which approaches were put in place and how they did things. It was anticipated that organisations might highlight important success factors and most useful methods when tackling workplace stress.

The initiatives identified are given in Table 7.5, categorised by size of organisation. The table shows the percentage of respondents indicating the use of a particular initiative and the rank order according to the relative frequency of use.

**Table 7.5**  
**Initiatives used and ranked in order of frequency of use reported by company size**

Intervention, Initiatives, Actions	Company Size					
	Small		Medium		Large	
	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank	%
Decrease workload and hours	1.5	15.3	8	4.9	12	2.6
Employee participation	1.5	15.3	2	14.8	6	7.8
Time out – breaks, social nights, fun, rest	3	13.3	10	3.3	14	0.6
Informal mentoring/support; flexible working	4	11.2	13	1.6	10.5	3.3
Stress awareness initiatives	5.5	8.2	1	15.6	1	14.3
Counselling / EAPs	5.5	8.2	3	14.0	2.5	13.0
Training	7	6.1	9	4.1	9	4.5
Stress Policy	8.5	5.1	4	12.3	2.5	13.0
Job design, rotation, variety	8.5	5.1	13	1.6	10.5	3.3
Support from other health professionals	10	4.1	5	10.8	4	12.3
Org. Devel. and Strategic Reviews	11.5	3.1	6	7.4	5	11.0
Increased teamwork / friendlier	11.5	3.1	13	1.6	13	2.0
Stress Audit	13.5	1.0	11	2.4	7	6.5
HR/Welfare Reviews etc	13.5	1.0	7	5.7	8	5.8
Total Number Reported	98		122		154	



The results show that for small companies there was a strong tendency to address work related stress by getting staff more involved, doing something to reduce their workload and hours worked, organising social activities, giving breaks, offering more informal support and flexible working and then offering stress awareness and counselling. These results suggested that small companies are tackling problems in a practical, problem solving manner as illustrated in some of the extracts taken from respondents (see below).

In the interviews they often reported that their size allowed them to see things happening and to take action quickly to overcome problems. As previously reported they also based their decisions on their own knowledge and experience, by involving staff to help decide on ways to reduce work stress.

In contrast the most popular option for medium and large companies was the use of stress awareness initiatives, with counselling services, employee participation, stress policies, stress audits and use of other professionals being other preferred actions. In the discussions with these organisations it was often noted that they had access to more resources and sources of help and advice than did their small company counterparts. The respondent often said that they had the ability to take a step back and analyse the problem and consult with specialist colleagues for more detailed advice and guidance.

Interventions can be classified as Primary (reducing stress at source), Secondary (identifying early signs of workplace stress and assisting individuals to deal more effectively with pressures at work) and Tertiary (limiting the impact of established cases of workplace stress by helping people cope and recover from stress related problems at work). The majority of interventions used by large organisations (42.2%) were categorised as Primary Interventions versus 34.4% for medium and 30.6% for small organisations. For medium and small organisations the majority of initiatives introduced were at the Secondary Level (Medium – 41%; Small – 57.2% and Large 32.5%) with over half of the actions taken by small organisations falling within this category.

All sizes of organisation reported fewer Tertiary Level initiatives, with only 12.2% of interventions used by small organisations falling within this category and about a quarter of the initiatives being in the level for medium (24.6%) and large (25.3%) organisations.

### **Results by Industry Sector**

When analysed by industry sector, all sectors reported using a range of interventions and initiatives. A cluster of preferred options could be identified for all sectors. These were:

- Stress Awareness Initiatives
- Counselling / EAPs
- Employee Participation
- Stress Policy and
- Support from other health professionals (not used by construction)

Other initiatives, such as strategic reviews and organisational development were also highly used. Other key initiatives for the Health, Manufacturing and Construction industries lay in workload and working hours issues. Many of the other initiatives used for example, involved job rotation, variety, increasing flexibility and increasing teamwork. All sectors used a variety of initiatives and the main findings centred around the size of company in relation to actions taken. In the comments it was also felt that larger and medium companies had more resources at their disposal than small companies.

To further describe the interventions and actions taken illustrative examples are given under the main headings below. These highlight some of the variety of approaches taken.

a. *Stress Awareness Initiatives*

- ‘Stress Awareness sessions – 4 sessions of 4-5 hours each – given to managers, and supervisors at present. Aims to help them identify stress symptoms in themselves and subordinates - giving systems to help them manage it.’ (Medium, Agriculture).
- ‘Senior Managers on stress awareness courses.’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Stress management training, tasters on a range of relaxation methods (head massage, complementary medicine, yoga, leisure) – helping to raise awareness.’ (Medium, Local Government).
- ‘Read stress awareness information.’ (Small, Retail & Services).
- ‘Stress awareness session.’ (Small, Finance).
- ‘Stress awareness – how to deal with difficult groups etc.’ (Small, Health).
- ‘Stress awareness course and training – starting point’. ‘H & S audits.’ (Large, Transport).

b. *Support from other health professionals (e.g. OH, Doctors, other)*

- ‘Company Doctor comes in every Wednesday.’ (Medium, Manufacturing).
- ‘Use of others to help monitor behaviours in classroom – useful in breaking patterns of behaviour that may be making job more stressful – working well – implemented as a positive aid not negative – key to helping keep stress down’ (Medium, Education).
- ‘Use of Occupational Therapists and counsellors to help with particular problems.’ (Medium, Education).
- ‘Medical service.’ (Large, Agriculture).
- ‘OH and Welfare Services.’ (Large, Emergency Services).

c. *Counselling / Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)*

- ‘External counselling – not formal, but can access.’ (Medium, Agriculture).
- ‘Counselling – in house, often a chance to chat over problems.’ (Medium, Construction).
- ‘Mechanisms to get counselling help – not just stress, broader help and advice to help’ (Medium, Emergency Services).
- ‘Nurses have counselling skills – give in-house service’ (Medium, Health).
- ‘Peer support and counselling/mentoring’ (Small, Education).
- ‘Talks, counselling.’ (Small, Health).
- ‘1:1 telephone counselling service.’ (Large, Construction).
- ‘EAP – now moving to shorter numbers of sessions as a way to help focus action.’ (Large, Finance).
- ‘Post traumatic stress debriefing and other counselling services – in-house and external where required’. ‘External may be preferred on occasions when confidentiality of concern.’ (Large, Emergency Services).

d. *Employee Participation*

- ‘Biggest thing – create a culture where people can come to you and talk.’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Open door policy.’ (Medium, Transport).
- ‘Introduced framework where workplace stress discussed in operational meetings every month.’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Have communications meetings to share and discuss information, such as, role ambiguity and conflict – removed barriers to stress by clarifying and reducing uncertainty.’ (Medium, Agriculture).
- ‘Discuss with staff, ideas, changes etc to see what they think will work’ (Small, Manufacturing).
- ‘Greater employee participation.’ (Small, Retail & Services).
- ‘Talk to people and find out area of concern and discuss how to address.’ (Small, Transport).
- ‘..weekly meetings to discuss issues – plan.’ (Small, Local Government).
- ‘Employee representatives forum – can talk about anything there.’ (Large, Manufacturing).
- ‘Mini health and safety committees – greater staff input.’ (Large, Education).
- ‘If suspect a problem can approach someone – more involved.’ (Large, Education).
- ‘Employee consultative forum.’ (Large, Health).

e. *Stress Policy*

- ‘Employee handbook and updated H & Safety policy – sets out information on stress – symptoms, and actions to take if things noted’ (Medium, Manufacturing).
- ‘H & S policy – stress part of’ (Medium, Construction).
- ‘H & S Policy – stress in it’ (Small, Finance).
- ‘Part of H & S policy’ (Large, Construction).
- ‘H & S Policy – road-show highlighting stress issues etc.’ (Large, Local Government).

f. *Stress Audit & HR/Welfare Reviews*

- ‘Use audit of symptoms of stress to look at issues.’ (Medium, Manufacturing).
- ‘Someone from H & S Dept doing a questionnaire survey and interview of general issues’ (Medium, Construction).
- ‘Part of process of reviews’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘HR processes – sickness returns – feeds into OH and wider – look at job etc’ (Medium, Transport).
- ‘Developing a stress risk assessment approach – use a check list of symptoms – developed in-house – useful survey’ (Medium, Local Government).
- ‘Full audit – use of IOM OSHA tool – actions taken such as introduction of OH Service – helpful...Use of staff opinion survey (administered by OSR) – powerful tool for benchmarking progress’ (Large, Finance).
- ‘Use of risk assessment approach important.’ (Large, Retail & Services).

- ‘Audit across company – student project, sickness absence processes.’ (Large, Construction).
- ‘New HR triggered a strategic review – raised awareness/issue of stress.’ (Small, Agriculture).
- ‘H & S risk assessment audit approach to stress – in-house questionnaire developed from literature of symptoms etc – helps identify issues.’ (Large, Manufacturing).
- ‘Audit – talked to all staff – found out areas of concern – growth – changing roles, responsibilities, conflicts etc – leads us to plan better and tackle issues.’ (Small, Education).
- ‘Personal stress audit being carried out.’ (Large, Health).
- ‘Stress audit – using OSI & Cary Cooper.’ (Large, Local Government).

g. *Organisational Development & Strategic Reviews*

- ‘Construction trying hard to change safety culture and increased team working – more open.’ (Medium, Construction).
- ‘Put in procedures to help people – planning, work etc – to make things less stressful.’ (Medium, Emergency Services).
- ‘Lot of problems back to organisational issues, such as, management decisions, moving staff, lack of consultation – need to look across board and work with all, especially safety advisers, to improve.’ (Large, Construction).
- ‘Cultural programme of change occurring – stress part of issues.’ (Large, Construction).
- ‘Proactive interventions for vulnerable groups etc.’ (Large, Emergency Services).
- ‘Major on-going organisational development – identifying organisational stressors (e.g. poor work sequencing, unskilled managers, communications issues, workload) – piloting a scheme of “annualised hours” – 1000+ hrs/year – matching activity levels to ups and downs of business activity. Lots of other initiatives – staff counsellors, increased communications etc – major organisational change – multi-disciplinary project. Deciding upon a hierarchy of interventions and in longer term will be publishing more about the approaches – long-term process, but prioritising action seen to be a good driver for success – feel increased motivation, satisfaction etc – but no formal measures yet.’ (Large, Health).

h. *Training*

- Increase in training’ (Small, Retail & Services).
- ‘Good training key to helping people in job – better able to deal with things’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Include bit about stress in induction course’ (Small, Finance).

i. *Increased Teamwork / Friendlier*

- ‘Very much team efforts as small farm’ (Small, Agriculture).
- ‘Awareness through discussions’ (Small, Manufacturing).
- ‘Know staff.’ (Small, Retail & Services).
- ‘Lot of training’ (Large, Retail & Services).

j. *Job design, rotation and variety*

- ‘Looking at shift patterns – forward versus reverse patterns – and effects on work’ (Medium, Manufacturing).
- ‘Jobs can get tedious – always looking at job rotation – move around, tasks and machines to reduce boredom and danger this causes – increase variety’ (Small, Manufacturing).
- ‘Delegate jobs – job re-design’ (Small, Manufacturing).
- ‘Common sense to get an alternate job for someone.’ (Small, Retail & Services).

k. *Decreasing workload and working hours*

- ‘If anyone has a problem they chat about it to manager and the job would be looked at via a risk assessment to see what could be done to change environment.’ (Medium, Agriculture).
- ‘Keep eye on those working long hours – working time directive useful’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Looked at shifts and type of work done – worked a night shift and did a pilot working a different day length and doing away with night shift – working very well – less problems and hassles’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Working 12 hours days!! Shortened to 8 hours – employed more staff’ (Small, Manufacturing).
- ‘Common sense – worked 4.5 day week – noted Fri people ‘wanting away’ – talked and decided to try working 1 hour per day longer and do a 4 day week – 1 day less travelling – found it increased morale, more flexible working – working!!’ (Small, Manufacturing).
- ‘Continually recruit staff as and when needed to dilute workload of others’ (Small, Construction).
- ‘Cut down Sat working and evening working – make take lunch break and get a walk.’ (Small, Finance).

l. *Informal mentoring/support and flexible working*

- ‘Keep eye out in an informal way – friendly, give extra time off, help etc flexible as needed.’ (Small, Retail & Services).
- ‘Everyone gets supervision support’ (Small, Education).
- ‘Demarcation between home and work –home/work balance’ (Small, Education).
- ‘Peer support and counselling’ (Small, Education).
- ‘External trainers and internal trained mentors both used to offer support’ (Large, Local Government).

m. *Time out – rests, breaks, fun, and social nights out*

- ‘..now ensure people take breaks and holidays – need breaks, now make employees take holidays, in past didn’t – has helped’ (Medium, Retail & Services).
- ‘Meet outside to have social gatherings, informal – often diffuses work stress’ (Medium, Health).
- ‘Nights out – social – to reduce tension’ (Small, Retail & Services).

It was interesting to note that of all the varied approaches used across sectors and sizes only 3 organisations were able to mention specific ‘off the shelf’ tools (OSI (developed by Cary Cooper), OSHA (developed by IOM) and Opinion Survey Research Benchmarking Opinion

Survey). The other organisations used risk assessment models and knowledge of stress issues to devise and develop their own questionnaires and audit tools where such methods were used.

### **How organisations inform staff about initiatives**

The most common ways for companies to let staff know about the interventions and initiatives used are given in Table 7.6.

**Table 7.6**  
**Common ways used to inform staff about initiatives and interventions used by company size. Table contains percentage of companies reporting communication methods used.**

<b>Methods used</b>	<b>Company size</b>		
	<b>Small</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Large</b>
Meetings, talks, discussions and chats	46.3	57.9	33.3
Notices, bulletins, newsletters	28.4	10.5	28.6
E-mails, multimedia	10.4	5.3	8.3
Handbook, policy	8.9	15.8	13.1
Other e.g. fliers in pay checks	4.2	2.6	9.5
Induction training	1.5	7.9	7.2

Surprisingly the use of e-mail is more popular in small companies with 10.4% ranking it as their 3<sup>rd</sup> place choice over policy/ handbook. Medium and Large companies place e-mail communication 5<sup>th</sup> in the ranking.

### **Perceived critical success factors in tackling workplace stress.**

Interviewees were asked to indicate what factors they felt to be critical in tackling workplace stress and which factors they had found most useful.

Most organisations felt that they could not choose a particular ‘most useful’ approach as it was too early to make a judgement (Large, 27.6%, Medium, 48.7% and Small 37.5%) but where choices were made, those mentioned are described below.

The most important factor across size and sector of organisation was that of developing open, honest communications where there was trust amongst and between staff and a willingness to participate and talk. The key was seen to be good communication and employee participation (Small, 37.5%, Medium, 48.7% and Large, 27.6%).

Other key factors, (especially for large organisations (27.6%)) included the need for organisations to accept that stress was a workplace health and safety issue. To really tackle issues (especially mentioned by larger organisations) there was often the need to change attitudes and the culture of the organisation. The need to get the support of senior managers to commit to tackling the issue was also mentioned. This is given weight by the fact that all participants in this follow-up survey made decisions about using interventions with senior staff involvement.

A major component of addressing workplace stress issues was being seen to be more proactive – identifying the symptoms of stress, sources of problems and possible ways to alleviate problems earlier in the work cycle. By doing these it was hoped that stress-related problems would decrease.

Often mentioned by smaller companies (28.1%), especially micro-businesses (those employing less than 10 people), was the increased need to get a balance between work and home. This was less frequently reported by medium (10.7%) and large (3.5%) companies. Achieving a balance between work and home often involved setting different priorities and realising that long hours, high workload and increasing work pressures and demands can have very serious consequences for mental and physical well-being. Several respondents mentioned that they had suffered from health problems, such as, high blood pressure, stroke, irritability and other problems that were attributed to workplace stress and this was often a trigger for action to ensure it did not happen to any of their employees.

Another area felt to be very useful was the use of support, such as mentoring and peer counselling (17.2% Large; 12.8% Medium and 12.5% Small). Again some organisations had formal mentoring systems in place where others adopted more informal supports and peer counselling.

## **7.6 OUTCOMES, EVALUATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF INITIATIVES USED (FORMAL AND INFORMAL).**

Interviewees were asked to indicate any outcome measures they had used or planned to use. Where any formal or informal evaluation had been undertaken they were asked for details. Table 7.7 shows the length of time initiatives had been in place in three broad categories (0-2 years; 3-5 years; more than 5 years) classified by company size.

**Table 7.7**  
**Length of time initiatives have been in place by company size. Table contains percentage of companies of each size group**

<b>Length of time in use</b>	<b>Company size</b>		
	<b>Small</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Large</b>
0 – 2 years	73	56	64
> 2 – 5 years	12	21	18
> 5 years	15	23	18

The results indicated that for most organisations the introduction of specific workplace stress interventions has taken place over the last 2 years.

For those who have had interventions in place longer these tended to be part of wider company ethos, policy and long standing practise. Those industrial sectors involved in longer-term initiatives were, health, emergency services, finance, construction, education, agriculture, retail and transport (where longer term health and safety initiatives and major change processes have been reported to occur). In the initial interview results Emergency Services, Education and Health were among those industries who were more aware of stress as an issue and more likely to be doing things to tackle the problem.

A key aim of the study was to establish whether employers regularly reviewed the actions they have taken in the management of work-related stress. The results indicated that formal evaluations were carried out by two small, three medium and six large organisations. The majority of employers reported that they either felt it was too early to complete formal evaluations or that they had tended to gather information in a less formal way – impressions, general views – with no major reviews of processes or cost/benefit analyses of interventions.

Of those organisations that had carried out evaluations the following information was given:

The evaluations in small and medium companies have centred around the analyses of sickness absence data and the following effects had been noted since introducing the interventions:

- sickness absence levels have gone down from 7.5days/annum to 5.5days / annum. (Medium, Finance);
- Sickness/days off has been halved (Small, Education);
- sickness levels had reduced by 1 day/annum. (Medium, Health);
- sickness levels are regularly reviewed on a quarterly basis and the levels of sickness absence have decreased since the interventions have been in place. (Medium, Education);
- productivity has increased in terms of quality and quantity and it's also a more relaxed place to work (Small, Manufacturing).

In large companies the evaluations have also encompassed wider organisational development issues as well as sickness absence analyses, as described below:

- Evaluation and monitoring over the past 3 years against benchmarks of past absence and ill-health retirement data held internally and obtained from other external sources. Since the initiative and interventions have been introduced there has been a dramatic decrease in both the number of ill-health retirements and sickness levels – genuine savings made. (Large, Emergency Services);
- Monitoring of sickness absence data takes place regularly and noted reductions in ill-health retirements and sickness absence levels. (Large, Emergency Services);
- Three workplace surveys have been completed – sickness levels and early retirement levels are monitored. Since the initiatives undertaken early retirement levels have decreased. (Large, Emergency Services);
- Use a range of evaluation measures – opinion surveys, stress audit tools and other organisational development processes put in place have been effective in reducing ill-health retirements on stress-related grounds. More proactive about symptoms of stress and sickness generally. On-going monitoring of staff on a yearly basis. (Large, Finance);
- Since their introduction the initiatives have had a significant impact – more of a long-term organisational change process and effects. Has led to improved communications dialogue and ability to identify occupational stressors, leading to action plan development for particular departments – improving working systems, such as, work sequencing, admissions and discharge procedures. These changes are now encouraging the unit to pilot an innovative scheme of annualised hours and they hope to publish research results about this system in the future. (Large, Health);
- Monitor sickness absence on a monthly basis – slight increase in reported levels of absence due to stress, but overall now estimate the initiatives are leading to an overall cut in sickness benefit from 12% to 7%. (Large, Health).

From the results it can be seen that a range of organisations are actually setting systems and procedures in place to regularly review and monitor the impact of initiatives and actions they are taking. Although organisations were asked, they were unable to supply cost-benefit analyses although these could probably be calculated from the information on the impact on sickness levels per annum.

#### **‘Informal and ad hoc’ evaluations of initiatives taken to address workplace stress.**

As the previous results indicated most organisations do not carry out regular or systematic reviews. Many reported that the systems and initiatives are at a very early stage and too early



to review. However, they report that they plan to conduct evaluations at later stages. In the absence of hard data the participants still felt that the process, actions and initiatives were having an impact within their organisations.

There were no major sectoral or size differences so the results are presented as a list of the most often mentioned effects in rank order.

### **Ranked order of impacts of initiatives to deal with workplace stress.**

*Major impacts were noted as:*

- More positive work environment – more open, a ‘no blame’ culture. Happier workplace, increased staff morale and job satisfaction.
- Reduction in sickness absence and ill-health retirements.
- Increased levels of stress reported.
- Increased awareness of stress as a workplace health and safety issue.
- Improved communications.
- Decreased staff turnover.

*Less frequently reported impacts were:*

- Increased commitment and dedication of staff, improved quality of work and more flexible working arrangements.
- Feels healthier – less stress / pressure – decreased workload.
- Increased productivity / profitability.
- Improved view of employer.
- Better work-life balance.
- People coping better and using services.
- Quicker return to work from stress-related illness.
- Better team-working.
- Reduced paperwork.

### **Other general issues raised during the interview**

The results highlight that for most organisations they were not at the moment carrying out formal evaluations of the impact of the systems introduced. In many cases they reported that it was too early to evaluate the impact of what they were doing as they were relatively new and the gains were seen as long-term as opposed to quick short-term changes. Even though organisations were not carrying out formal evaluations yet, they often indicated that this was part of their longer-term strategy. Many reported reservations about their ability to measure impact beyond hard data such as sickness absence, turnover and better workplaces.

In many instances organisations reported that they would benefit from having more guidance about work-related stress and how to address it. The larger organisations felt that an code of practice or specific legislation might be useful whereas smaller organisations often asked for information on ‘what others are doing’ to give them ideas both about what they could do and also to get a sense of whether they were doing ‘good things’.

Many commented that they often found it difficult to appreciate whether stress was caused by work or was more a function of someone's personal home life. In the majority of cases they felt that a more holistic approach was useful when dealing with 'stress in the round' of the persons life. They felt that the impact on work of any stress could be negative and that it was important to offer help and assistance irrespective of the root cause (showed a caring side of the employer and also enabling the person to perform better in work).

Other employers reported that it was important to find the source of the problem with respect to stress in the workplace. One gave the analogy of a cut finger and sticking-plaster – you can keep giving a plaster for a cut but if you do not find out where and why the cut is occurring you'll never stop the cut happening.



## 8. DISCUSSION

In this section we will review the findings in relation to the objectives of the study and highlight how these findings may have implications for the prioritisation of activities during HSE's campaign to tackle occupational stress. This new strategy aims to:

- work with partners to develop clear, agreed standards of good management practice for a range of stressors
- better equip HSE inspectors and local authority officers to handle the issues in their work
- encourage active involvement in developing a more comprehensive approach to managing stress
- launch publicity to help educate employers.

It was intended that the survey should provide good coverage of SMEs. This objective was achieved, as 46.9% of the total companies surveyed employed less than 50 employees and 28.5% employed between 50 and 250. Response rates achieved were similar for both small and large companies. Industry sectors as classified by SIC 92 were all represented fairly evenly although Retail formed a larger percentage of the total and Emergency Services which are arranged on a regional basis formed a smaller percentage than the average. Lowest response rates (less than 20%) were seen for large Agricultural establishments and small – medium Local Government groups. It was felt that this reflected difficulty in locating the most relevant company contact within the short timescale available for the telephone survey, rather than any preference by these groups not to participate in the survey.

### *Stress – an important occupational issue?*

Findings by company size suggested that larger organisations were more likely to recognise stress as a problem in their company and more likely to acknowledge a change in attitude over the last 2 years. Large companies were more likely to have a written policy to address stress related problems and be more willing to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce workplace stress. These findings are not surprising given the resources often available to larger companies, however it also perhaps reflects the way in which large organisations deal with health and safety issues, which will be discussed in more detail later. Specific industries who followed this pattern of findings were Emergency Services, Health Care and Local Government and to a lesser extent the education sector.

Almost 90% of respondents felt that stress could cause work-related illness although only 27.2% felt that this was true for their company. This held true across all sizes of organisation. To some extent this reflects findings of the Good Health is Good Business evaluation (GHGB) by Wright *et al* (2000), which suggested that most respondents perceived that ill health had minimal costs for their business. However, respondents to the GHGB evaluation stated that they would be prepared to do more if they understood health risk management better.

The Health Care sector (35%) is more likely to consider workplace stress a problem for their company than the majority of other industry sectors, but less so than the Local Government sector (55%) and the Emergency Services (65%) sector. This finding may reflect a greater perception of work-related stress than actually exists, perhaps due to raised media awareness over the last few years. Alternatively, companies may have been reluctant to admit a problem 'in-house' when responding to a telephone survey of this nature. With many health issues individual awareness is often heightened when there is a direct effect to themselves or

to someone close to them. During the follow up interviews when specific interventions were discussed in more detail, it was clear that particularly for small companies, the decision to act was often based on adverse health outcomes which had occurred within the workforce. This highlights the importance of health education to personalise the possible impacts of work-related stress, rather than the more nebulous phenomenon which is often perceived. Raising awareness in this manner, and the provision of management guidance on appropriate intervention will also be important in promoting cultural change within certain sectors.

Sixty two percent of companies reporting problems with work-related stress felt that stress levels had increased in the last 12 months. This finding is consistent with increased reports by individuals participating in the Bristol Stress survey (Smith *et al*, 2000) and raised awareness of general health issues reported in the Good Health is Good Business evaluation (Wright *et al*, 2000). This increase was reported by most sectors, but those sectors already reporting high levels such as Emergency Services, Local Government and Education often reported levels about the same as the previous year. The increase was noted more frequently by companies employing less than 250 people. In general, sectors reporting increased levels of stress are more likely to have introduced some form of initiatives to address the problem.

The general parameters normally associated with workplace stress such as increased absence, staff turnover, lower morale and increased reports of stress were not reported as showing significant changes in trend by any of the sectors interviewed. However, lower morale was reported by approximately half of those companies reporting increased stress. This may reflect the fact that companies often respond to a 'gut feeling' rather than formally analysing objective data about the possible impacts of work-related stress. Restructuring, increased workload and new IT were the most common changes taking place within companies reported by respondents in the last 12 months. These factors were the most commonly reported across all sizes of company, and reflect sources of stress cited by companies in earlier work by the IOM (Butler *et al*, 1997 and Lancaster *et al*, 1999).

#### *Stress – another health and safety issue?*

Almost 80% of respondents felt that stress should be controlled in the same way as other health and safety issues. This mirrors the findings of the HSE Discussion Document on Managing Stress at Work. This response was reflected across all sectors included in the study. It suggests that work-related stress is seen as a legitimate health and safety issue by companies within all sizes and sectors, thus addressing one study objective.

Forty eight percent of respondents favoured a code of practice, or specific legislation, which is fewer than respondents to the HSE Discussion Document. Whilst many respondents support the proposal that stress should be seen as a legitimate health and safety issue and dealt with in a similar manner, there is possible concern about the implications of a legislative approach. This suggests that practices falling outside the scope of such a document would be unsatisfactory and could be subject to legislative action. It is clear that more support and guidance on the management of work-related stress would be required before companies felt more comfortable with this option. This also has implications for the timescale in which a code of practice or specific legislation were introduced.

Only 22% of respondents had a written policy to address stress-related problems, although this was more likely within the Emergency Services group with over 50% reporting a written policy. Larger companies were more likely to have a policy, but the majority still had no policy. For those respondents reporting a written policy this was almost always part of the health and safety policy and system. Only 36% reported that a policy would be likely within the next 12 months. Larger companies (employing more than 250) were more likely to express this commitment. In general, this may reflect lack of knowledge about policy formulation, or companies awaiting further feedback on the HSE Discussion Document, or it

not being seen as a priority. The feedback from the GHGB evaluation would suggest that many respondents were satisfied with their current health risk management initiatives. Providing more education for managers on work-related stress and problem-solving initiatives would seem essential if this trend is to change.

Most respondents (77.6%) felt that managing stress at work should be primarily the responsibility of the employer, although the employees responsibility for health and lifestyle was acknowledged by a substantial number of respondents. Companies employing fewer than 50 people were also more likely to suggest employees were responsible for tackling stress. This may reflect the limited resources within small companies, and their reliance on individuals within a small team to meet performance targets. It may also suggest that small companies were less willing to take responsibility for managing workplace stress, although this was not borne out by the information obtained on the initiatives introduced by small companies, from the follow-up interviews. Tackling workplace stress is more likely to be viewed as mainly the responsibility of the employee in the Agriculture (62%), Construction (52%) and Financial (50%) sectors as compared to the other industry sectors. This may reflect specific cultural factors within these sectors.

#### *Changing attitudes to stress*

Attitudes to stress were more likely to have changed in the last 2 years in Education, Local Government and among Emergency services. Most other sectors had similar numbers reporting no change as those reporting changes in attitude. Again, this reflects those sectors most likely to report increasing levels of stress in the last 12 months, and perhaps the need to be seen to take action in these circumstances. Companies employing less than 50 people were more likely to report no change in attitude. The positive changes reported were mostly seen to be associated with increased awareness due to media coverage and a more sympathetic approach from managers. Encouragingly, organisations also seem to be responding to feedback from employees. These factors were more commonly reported in companies reporting similar levels of stress in the last 12 months.

Costs of litigation and HSE initiatives were less commonly cited as responsible for change in attitudes to stress. This trend in reporting was the same for all company sizes. This is somewhat surprising as litigation and regulatory requirements are often seen as the main trigger factors for companies, and lack of regulatory enforcement is seen to be a limiting factor in improving the situation. However, it is clear that adverse events within a company or reports of problems within similar sectors were likely to have more impact on the decision to act. This factor was particularly important for small companies. It again reinforces the need for initiatives to raise awareness of actual outcomes in relation to work-related stress and practical advice on problem solving.

#### *Resources to address workplace stress*

Over 40% of respondents were not currently aware of any resources to address work-related stress, for example risk assessment tools or training packages. The Local Government, Emergency Services, Education, Health Care and Manufacturing sectors are more likely to be aware of resources that are available to address work-related stress (e.g. information and training books, videos, risk assessment tools etc.) than the other industry sectors. In particular, companies employing less than 50 people were much less aware of currently available resources. Over the last few years, the amount of literature available on work-related stress has increased significantly, but this suggests that companies are not clear about how to access this information. Raising awareness of appropriate sources of help, is particularly important for small companies, who may not be able to afford to 'buy in' expert help.

Appropriate training for line managers and supervisors was the most favoured option by 57.7% of respondents, in helping them to tackle workplace stress more effectively. This finding emphasises the perceived need for more guidance on managing workplace stress. Just under 50% thought stress awareness campaigns, more printed information and risk assessment tools would be helpful. Only 29.5% favoured IT-based self help packages and only 36.7% thought that more staff and resources would help them to address workplace stress more effectively. These trends were true across the different company sizes. It is often assumed by regulatory bodies that IT based packages will be well received by the target audience. However this study and earlier work among farming groups (Pilkington *et al*, 2000) does not support this assertion. In general, it is clear that 'a broad brush' approach is required in tackling workplace stress, with a number of sources of help being made available. In general, companies seem to prefer to use a range of initiatives, and tend to respond to a wide range of trigger factors. A campaign which publicises the range of initiatives available is likely to achieve more success than one which has a narrow focus.

### *Steps to reduce workplace stress*

Approximately 55% of all respondents were willing to consider working in partnership with other agencies or groups. This was particularly favoured by the Financial sector, Education, Emergency services, Health Care and Local Government but not particularly favoured by Construction or Transport sectors. However, companies employing less than 25 people were least willing to consider working in partnership. Given the strategy which HSE propose to adopt to tackle workplace stress, it is important that the benefits of collaboration are highlighted and that measures are introduced to facilitate this process. Small companies appear willing to share information among themselves, and developing networks with access to a small business adviser may be helpful.

Further study objectives were to establish whether employers were taking action to reduce the risk of work-related stress, and whether they regularly reviewed actions they had taken. Forty per cent (286) of respondents stated that their company had taken steps to reduce workplace stress. The proportion of companies who reported taking steps to reduce stress increased as company size increased, from 28% among small companies to 42% among medium, and 58% among large companies. Local Government and Emergency Services were the most likely organisations to have taken steps to reduce stress, followed by the Education and Health Care sectors. This perhaps reflects the raised levels of stress which were reported across many of these sectors. Relatively few companies from the Construction and Retail and Services sector had taken steps to reduce stress.

Of the companies introducing interventions, 209 were willing to discuss the interventions in more detail. These companies were fairly evenly spread across the different size categories and all sectors were represented. The Construction sector, the Transport sector, Health care, Local Government and the Education sector were among the most willing to discuss their interventions in more detail. Companies reporting increased stress or similar levels of stress in the last 12 months were most willing to discuss their interventions, as were those reporting a change in attitude to workplace stress over the last 2 years. Companies expressing a willingness to work in partnership with other agencies were also more likely to participate in the follow-up interviews. This again suggests that awareness initiatives need to be targeted principally to those sectors who have not yet introduced interventions, show little change in attitude or are reluctant to consider working in partnership with other groups.

The initiatives most favoured by companies seeking to reduce stress were counselling or EAP support, or some form of stress awareness initiative. Few companies reported using audits, and just under a third had used employee participation initiatives or sought help from health professionals. This reflects the findings of the main telephone survey. Just under 40% of those reporting steps to reduce workplace stress said they had evaluated the effectiveness

of these measures. Large companies were more likely to have carried out evaluations than medium or small sized companies. Lack of understanding of how to solve stress-related problems was the most commonly cited reason for not taking action to reduce stress. Lack of resources and unfavourable management style were also common factors for limiting action.

The results of the follow up interviews confirmed that all industry sectors were using a range of interventions and initiatives to tackle workplace stress. However it was unusual to find companies using recognised psychosocial tools (e.g. Occupational Stress Indicator) in order to assess the impacts of work-related stress, and even on direct questioning most respondents had little knowledge of such tools. Given the fact that a number of such tools have been developed and widely used in research practice, it is important that knowledge gained about these tools is applied to the practical needs of companies. Education initiatives are also essential to ensure that companies use the appropriate tool for the circumstances and taking account of their own resources. The results indicated that most interventions used by large companies tended to focus upon reducing the problem at source with 42.2% of interventions aimed at the Primary Level of prevention. For medium (41%) and small (57.2%) companies the majority of interventions used were Secondary Level initiatives.

### *Factors influencing action*

The follow-up interviews suggested that the major reasons for small employers to take steps to reduce stress were related to the effects of stress. Both increased awareness and actual experience of problems, and the nature of work itself, i.e. longer hours, increasing demands and workload, were cited as important factors. This illustrates the importance of practical issues for small organisations in deciding to tackle occupational stress, and suggests that new initiatives must meet the practical needs of small employers.

Small companies also tend to address work related stress by involving staff, for example by: taking steps to reduce workload and hours worked, organising social activities, giving breaks, offering informal support and flexible working. This suggests that small companies are tackling problems in a practical way best suited to their needs.

Medium and large companies were more likely to act on organisational indicators such as: increasing sickness absence; increasing stress; information from sources such as HSE, other health and safety organisations, the media and feedback from those doing the job. Medium organisations in particular, reported a larger range of factors for taking action and less than forty per cent of the factors were within the top five factors quoted by the majority of small or large organisations. This suggests that triggers for action in medium organisations is somewhat different to small or large enterprises.

The results emphasised the wide variety of factors that can influence response to stress in the workplace and that organisations act on many cues without necessarily having a structure or framework on which to act, and to facilitate later evaluation. It appears that providing more structured guidance on risk factors, and a practical risk management approach would help in producing a more consistent response to workplace stress. It is important that the education process supporting this initiative should take into account the complex range of trigger factors which prompt companies to take action. This is particularly relevant in equipping HSE inspectors and local authority officers to handle workplace stress issues, as currently it appears that such expert advice is more likely to be seen as relevant to larger companies. It is important that inspectors are able to provide appropriate advice to all companies of all sizes.

The results also indicate that small companies tend to make decisions based on knowledge of events within the organisation, discussing options with staff and getting information from other sources such as small business advisers, and HSE among others. It is therefore



important to ensure that systems are set up to support small companies, allowing them to share information with other local groups and providing access to specialists that they see as most helpful in meeting their needs. In contrast, medium and large organisations seek advice from a variety of expert internal and external sources as their first step, as opposed to mainly relying on their own knowledge.

Across all sectors senior management were most influential in making decisions about which initiatives to introduce. This suggests that this group of individuals should be targeted in terms of increasing awareness of appropriate interventions and training initiatives. However, in Health, Education, Transport, Retail & Services and Agriculture a higher percentage of respondents said that decisions were made by all staff, regardless of their grade. This reflects the findings of the main survey, which showed that organisations were responding to feedback from employees, and encouraging employee participation in decision making. In planning a future strategy, initiatives such as focus groups, which allow employee participation are likely to be well received in this regard. Also mentioned as critical to the success of interventions was the need for good communication within companies and between relevant groups, and a proactive approach to the problem.

#### *Evaluation of interventions*

The results indicate that most organisations had introduced specific workplace stress interventions over the last 2 years. Therefore, the majority of employers felt it was too early to complete formal evaluations, and gains were seen as long term rather than short term benefits. In some instances they had tended to gather information in a less formal way – impressions, general views – but as anticipated no major reviews of processes, or cost/benefit analyses of interventions had taken place. However, in some instances respondents were able to supply information on impact on sickness levels per annum.

Although organisations were not carrying out formal evaluations yet, they do indicate that this is part of their longer-term strategy. However, many report reservations about their ability to measure impact beyond hard data, such as sickness absence, and staff turnover. This reflects the findings from the main survey, that companies often felt they lacked knowledge about how to assess the impacts of work-related stress. However, in the absence of hard data respondents still felt that the initiatives taken were having a positive effect within their organisation. It is therefore timely to consider how to assist companies in making better use of the data they have available, and to provide simple tools to assist companies in future evaluation. This will ultimately be beneficial to HSE in assessing the impacts of future campaigns to reduce the levels of workplace stress.

Of the informal evaluations most organisations cite benefits such as: a better working environment; reductions in sickness absence and ill-health retirements; increased awareness of stress as a health and safety issue; improved communication and reduced staff turnover. Raising awareness of stress also tends to result in increased reports of stress and stress-related sickness absence. However, respondents tended to view this as a positive sign suggesting that people were more willing to admit to having a stress problem and less fearful of being stigmatised as a consequence.

#### *Possible future needs*

In the follow up survey, organisations again reported that they would benefit from having more guidance about how to address work-related stress. The larger organisations felt a code of practice, or specific legislation, may be useful. Smaller organisations often asked for information on ‘what others are doing’ to give them ideas about what they can do and whether they are doing ‘good things’. Again, this reflects the difference in how small and large companies chose to act on workplace stress problems, and for small companies context

is important to allow them to identify issues as relevant and enable them to make effective change. It also emphasises the need for a strategy, which provides a framework for action, based on good practice that can be achieved by all.

In general companies across different sizes and sectors favoured a holistic approach to tackling stress, appreciating the difficulties of separating the effects of stress caused by work from those arising from personal circumstances. A small number of organisations considered that stress was a personal issue and implied that the individual was in the wrong job. A similar attitude towards workplace stress was reported by a British Safety Council survey that suggested a 'hard core' of managers in the UK viewed stress as an excuse for 'skiving'.

It is important that any future legislation recognises the impact of non-work factors and the lack of control which employers, in particular, may have over some of these factors. Employers may also need support in addressing the inevitable overlap which will occur due to non-work factors when introducing measures to reduce workplace stress.



## 9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The survey provided good coverage of company sectors and sizes, and showed that almost 90% of respondents felt that stress could cause work-related illness. However, only 27.2% felt that work-related stress was a problem for their company. Perhaps this reflects a greater perception of the problem than exists in reality, or alternatively a reluctance to admit a problem 'in-house'. However, it also reinforces the need to gain a better understanding of the prevalence of work-related stress.
- 9.2 Larger organisations are more likely to recognise stress as a problem in their company and more likely to acknowledge a change in attitude over the last 2 years. Large companies were also more likely to have a written policy to address stress related problems and show greater willingness to work in partnership with other agencies to reduce workplace stress. This pattern was true for Emergency Services, Health Care, Local Government and to a lesser extent the Education sector. These sectors also reported continuing high levels of stress, whilst companies employing less than 250 people were more likely to report increased levels of stress over the last 2 years. This was most commonly reflected as lower morale among staff in those companies reporting increased stress.
- 9.3 Attitudes to stress were more likely to have changed in the last 2 years in Education, Local Government and among Emergency Services. All these sectors reported high stress levels. The positive changes reported were mostly seen to be associated with increased awareness due to media coverage and a more sympathetic approach from managers. Encouragingly, organisations also seem to be responding to feedback from employees.
- 9.4 Companies employing less than 50 people were more likely to report no change in attitude, and were also more likely to suggest that employees were mostly responsible for tackling stress. This suggests that small companies may benefit from more information on the role of the employer in reducing the risks of workplace stress, and from opportunities to share good practice with companies from similar backgrounds.
- 9.5 Almost 80% of respondents felt that stress should be controlled in the same way as other health and safety issues, and therefore considered it to be a legitimate health and safety issue. In general companies across different sizes and sectors favoured a holistic approach to tackling stress, acknowledging both work and non work-related components. The importance of open, honest communication and a proactive approach to the problem was also highlighted by all sectors.
- 9.6 Most organisations felt that they would benefit from having more guidance about how to address work-related stress. Larger organisations felt a code of practice, or specific legislation, may be useful whereas smaller organisations preferred information on 'what others are doing', to help them develop similar initiatives. Practical issues were particularly important for small organisations in deciding to tackle work-related stress, and suggests that new initiatives, to be successful, must meet the practical needs of small employers.
- 9.7 Medium and large companies were more likely to act on organisational indicators of workplace stress, and be influenced by information coming from bodies, such as HSE. Therefore, structured guidance and a legislative approach may best meet their needs.

- 9.8 Appropriate training for line managers and supervisors was seen as the most useful way of providing help to companies in tackling workplace stress. It appears across industry sectors and sizes, that senior management are most influential in making decisions about which initiatives to introduce. This further reinforces that this group should be targeted in terms of increasing awareness of appropriate interventions and training initiatives
- 9.9 Only 22% of respondents had a written policy to address stress-related problems. Again, providing more education for managers on work-related stress would seem essential if this trend is to change.
- 9.10 Over 40% of respondents were currently unaware of any resources to address work-related stress, and this was particularly so for companies employing less than 50 people. This would suggest that further publicity is required available sources of help and how to access these.
- 9.11 In the main companies tended to act on a wide range of cues when deciding to intervene in workplace stress, without necessarily having a structure or framework on which to act, or to facilitate later evaluation. It was rare to find recognised psychosocial tools being used to assess workplace stress, and in general there was a lack of knowledge about the existence of such assessment methods.
- 9.12 Lack of understanding of how to solve stress-related problems, was the most commonly cited reason for not taking action to reduce stress. Lack of resources and lack of a supportive management style were also commonly cited factors, for not taking action.
- 9.13 Just under half of respondents (48%) stated that their company had taken steps to reduce workplace stress. The initiatives most favoured by companies seeking to reduce stress were counselling or EAP support, or some form of stress awareness initiative. Few companies reported using audits, and just under a third had used employee participation initiatives or sought help from health professionals.
- 9.14 Companies reporting increased or similar levels of stress in the last 12 months were most willing to discuss their interventions, as were those reporting a change in attitude to workplace stress over the last 2 years. Companies expressing a willingness to work in partnership with other agencies were also more likely to participate in the follow-up interviews
- 9.15 Most companies who had introduced initiatives to reduce workplace stress, had only implemented these within the last two years, perhaps reflecting the increased awareness of this problem within the media and via government agencies during this time period. The majority of employers felt it was too early to complete formal evaluations of their interventions, and perceived gains as long term rather than short term benefits. Where hard data was available, this most often related to impact on sickness levels. Companies had not performed cost-benefit analyses and were often unsure how to approach this in relation to initiatives to reduce work-related stress. This would suggest that companies need more assistance in evaluating the costs and benefits of interventions to reduce workplace stress.
- 9.16 Approximately 55% of all respondents were willing to consider working in partnership with other agencies or groups. However, companies employing less than 25 people were least willing to consider working in partnership. This perhaps reflects the tendency for small companies to try to deal with problems 'in-house'. They are keen to have information on practical solutions which have worked for other small

companies, and so an opportunity exists for information sharing and collaboration between similar sized companies and sectors.

- 9.17 Overall, the results confirm that workplace stress is considered an important and legitimate health and safety issue. Whilst companies of all sizes, across all sectors have introduced a range of initiatives to tackle the problem, there is no clear framework for action. In general, the benefits and associated costs of these interventions have not been evaluated.
- 9.18 It is apparent that a wide variety of factors can influence response to stress in the workplace and that organisations act on many cues without necessarily having a structure or framework on which to act, and to facilitate later evaluation.
- 9.19 It appears that providing more structured guidance on risk factors, and a practical risk management approach would help in producing a more consistent response to workplace stress. It is important that the education process supporting this initiative should take into account the complex range of trigger factors which promote companies to act.
- 9.20 It would appear that the main strategies proposed within the HSE campaign are all important. However as 40% of those surveyed were currently unaware of any available resources to tackle work-related stress, it would seem that awareness raising and provision of information on suitable resources was an important first step. As there is a lack of consistency and clarity in how to tackle workplace stress, then it is important to develop clear, agreed standards of management practice. Once developed these standards should be communicated within appropriate training programmes. Line management training was seen as an important priority by most respondents. Training for HSE inspectors and local authority officers is an important adjunct and should raise awareness of how company size may influence the triggers for and likely modes of action.



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## APPENDIX 1A

### Questionnaire used for main telephone survey

#### *Background data on organisation*

1. How many staff are employed in your company
  - a. <25
  - b. 25-50
  - c. >50-250
  - d. >250-500
  - e. >500
  
2. Which sector of industry does your company represent. Is it ....?
  
3. (a) Does your company consider that stress can cause work-related illness  
Y/N  
(b) Is workplace stress a problem for your company  
Y/N  
(c) **If Y**  
Over the last 12 months do you think levels of stress in your company have:
  - Increased
  - decreased
  - are about the same
  
4. Are you aware of any of the following occurring in the last 12 months
  - increased staff absences
  - increased staff turnover
  - lower staff morale
  - increased reports of stress
  
5. Have any of the following occurred in your company in the last 12 months
  - restructuring
  - merger
  - changes in job security
  - introduction of new technology
  - more flexible working roles
  - increased workload
  - outsourcing of functions

#### Stress issues

6. Does your company consider that stress should be controlled in the same way as other workplace health and safety issues  
Y/N
  
7. (a) In your company would tackling workplace stress be viewed as mainly the responsibility of the employer  
Y/N  
(b) **If N**  
Mainly the responsibility of the employee  
Y/N

8. (a) In your company have attitudes towards stress changed over the last 2 years  
Y/N  
(b) **If Y**  
Which of the following factors have been associated with the change
- more sympathetic approach from management
  - concerns about costs of litigation
  - raised awareness due to media coverage
  - raised awareness due to HSE initiatives
  - feedback from employees
  - other factors (specify)
9. (a) Does your company have a written policy to address stress related problems  
Y/N  
(b) **If Y**  
Has this policy been integrated as part of the H& S policy and system  
Y/N  
(c) **If N**  
Is a policy likely to be developed within the next 12 months  
Y/N
10. (a) Are you aware of any resources to address work-related stress (e.g. information and training books, videos, risk assessment tools etc.)  
Y/N  
(b) Which of the following would help your company to address workplace stress more effectively:
- HSE Code of practice or legislation
  - Support from other specialist groups (eg. HEA, HEBS, counselling)
  - Simple risk assessment tools
  - Stress awareness campaigns
  - More printed information
  - IT based self-help packages
  - Appropriate training for line management and supervisors
  - More staff and resources
11. Is your company willing to consider working in partnership with other agencies (such as health promotion units, larger companies with expertise etc.) to reduce workplace stress  
Y/N

### Specific interventions

- 12 (a) Has your company taken any specific steps to reduce workplace stress  
Y/N  
(b) **If Y**  
Which of the following steps have been taken:
- Stress audit
  - Stress awareness initiatives
  - Stress policy
  - Employee participation in focus groups
  - Counselling or employee assistance programme
  - Support from other health professionals (eg. Psychologist)
  - Other (please specify)
- (c) Has your company evaluated the effectiveness of the steps they have taken  
Y/N

**(d) If N to 12a**

What do you think are the obstacles to taking these steps:

- Management style
- Stress not seen as an important priority
- Lack of resources
- Lack of understanding of how to solve stress-related problems
- Fear of opening a can of worms
- Not aware of local sources of help
- Other (please specify)

**Contact details**

13 Respondent name and job title.

14 The research data will be held by the IOM. Do you have any objection to them holding your contact details.

If Yes to Q12

15 Would you be willing to discuss the stress interventions your company has made with a colleague from the IOM. These further interviews will take about 10 minutes.

If Yes

16 What is the best time to try and contact you.

Questions for telephone contacts not wishing to participate in the telephone interview

1. (a) Does your company consider that stress can cause work-related illness  
Y/N  
(b) Is workplace stress a problem for your company  
Y/N
  
2. (a) Has your company taken any specific steps to reduce workplace stress  
Y/N  
(b) **If Y** Has your company evaluated the effectiveness of the steps they have taken  
Y/N  
  
(c) **If N**  
What do you think are the obstacles to taking these steps:
  - Management style
  - Stress not seen as an important priority
  - Lack of resources
  - Lack of understanding of how to solve stress-related problems
  - Fear of opening a can of worms
  - Not aware of local sources of help
  - Other (please specify)

## **1b. Follow up questionnaire**

### **Introduction**

Good morning/afternoon, my name is Rachel and I am calling from the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM) in Edinburgh, an independent centre of occupational health research and consultancy.

You may recall (Just to remind you about the purpose of the call) that a few months ago you took part in a telephone interview carried out by MORI on behalf of the IOM. The interview was part of our research investigation, commissioned by the HSE, examining current practices among employers in the area of work-related stress.

(The HSE defines stress as “the adverse reaction that people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them; it arises when they feel they cannot cope”.)

At that stage you kindly agreed to take part in a follow-up interview to further discuss the stress interventions/actions your organisation has taken, in order to help find out more about their use and impact.

Would now be a convenient time to talk, the interview will take about 10-15 minutes.

\*\*If not – when would be a convenient time to contact you?

Day:

Date:

Time:

In the answers to the survey, I would like you to consider how and why your company decided to carry out the interventions and how they are/have been evaluated.

Company Details:

Contact Name:

Telephone Number:

Sector:

Size:



**A: What factors influenced the decision to introduce interventions.**

What prompted your company to introduce workplace stress interventions?

In your organisation did you introduce workplace stress interventions to address organisational or individual problems in the field of stress?

**B:** How did they arrive at the particular options/interventions they chose?

How did you/your company decide upon the stress-related interventions you have used? (How did you decide upon the types of workplace stress interventions you introduced – for example, types of information, contacts etc?)

Who was involved in the selection /decisions about which intervention to use?

**C:** What was done?

Describe the interventions used – what steps were taken in the interventions? What types of tools, methodologies, instruments used?)

How did you communicate information about the interventions?

(How did you let staff know about what was available / happening?)

Of the interventions used, which one did you find most useful? And why?

**D:** Outcomes, measures of impact, evaluation, effectiveness of interventions

How long have you had the interventions in place?

Are you planning to carry on with the interventions?

What did your company hope to achieve by the interventions?  
(What were you expecting success to look like?)

What has happened as a result of the interventions being introduced?  
(Has there been a reduction in workplace stress?)  
(What effect have the interventions had and why?)  
(What effect have the interventions had on the levels of work-related stress in your company?)

How have you assessed the impact/effect of the interventions?

How will you make the decision about how well the intervention has worked – what measures are you taking to assess impact/value?

And finally – Would you use the same again? And Why?

Any other comments.



## APPENDIX 2: INDUSTRY SIZE

The tables in this appendix describe the key variables by industry size, with brief discussion of the results.

**Table A2.1**  
**Response to Q3B 'Is workplace stress a problem for your company?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

Industry Size	Is workplace stress a problem for your company?				Total
	Yes		No		
Small	73	22	266	78	339
Medium	56	27	150	73	206
Large	68	38	110	62	178
Total	197	27	526	73	723

Table A2.2 shows that the percentage of companies which view workplace stress as a problem increases as the size of the company increases. Large companies (> 250) are most likely to view workplace stress as a problem, followed by medium sized companies, with small companies least likely to view workplace stress as a problem.

In companies where workplace stress is seen as a problem, small and medium sized companies are more likely to have seen an increase in levels of stress within their company over the last 12 months (67% in small companies and 63% in medium sized companies compared to 57% in large companies). Therefore, although proportionally fewer small companies feel that workplace stress is a problem, more of these have seen a recent increase in stress levels.

**Table A2.2**  
**Response to Q4 'Are you aware of any of the following occurring in the last 12 months?'. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively**

Industry Size	Are you aware of any of the following occurring in the last 12 months?									
	Increased staff absences		Increased staff turnover		Lower staff morale		Increased reports of stress		None of these	
Small	39	12	25	7	58	17	27	8	246	73
Medium	47	23	35	17	59	29	32	16	107	52
Large	34	19	43	24	59	33	48	27	81	46
Total	120	17	103	14	176	24	107	15	434	60

From Table A2.2 it can be seen that large and medium sized companies are more likely than small companies to have reported occurrence of each of these issues. Almost three-quarters of small companies reported that none of these had occurred, compared to around half of medium and large companies. The most commonly occurring event in all sizes of company was lowering of staff morale.

**Table A2.3**  
**Response to Q5 'Have any of the following occurred in your company in the last 12 months?'. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively**

	Industry Size							
	Small		Medium		Large		Total	
Restructuring	86	25	86	42	127	71	299	41
Merger	16	5	28	14	56	31	100	14
Changes in job security	38	11	36	17	71	40	145	20
Intro of new technology	120	35	83	40	105	59	308	43
More flexible working roles	66	19	55	27	74	42	195	27
Increased workload	130	38	99	48	108	61	337	47
Outsourcing of functions	44	13	37	18	66	37	147	20
None of these	104	31	36	17	12	7	152	21

All of these events are more likely to have occurred in large companies than in medium and small companies. Only 7% of large companies report none of these events, compared to 17% of medium companies and almost one-third of small companies. Most commonly reported events in all company sizes were the introduction of new technology and increased workload, while 71% of large and 42% of medium companies also reported restructuring in the past 12 months.

The majority of companies (568; 79%) felt that tackling workplace stress was the responsibility of the employer, and this percentage was similar for all sizes of companies. Among those who thought tackling stress was not the responsibility of the employer, small companies (51%) are more likely to view tackling workplace stress as mainly the responsibility of the employee, followed by medium sized companies (33%), and large companies (24%). Ninety-eight companies (38 small, 29 medium and 31 large) felt it was neither the responsibility of the employer or the employee.

There is an increasing trend in changes in attitudes towards stress across industry size. As industry size increases, the percentage of companies in which attitudes towards stress have changed over the last 2 years increases (37% in small companies compared to 54% in medium sized companies and 68% in large sized companies).

**Table A2.4**  
**Response to Q8B 'Which of the following factors have been associated with a change in attitudes towards stress over the last two years. Each cell contains number and *percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively. Percentages are of the number of companies who have changed attitude to stress (127 small, 112 medium, 121 large)**

	Industry Size							
	Small		Medium		Large		Total	
More sympathetic management	65	51	69	62	73	60	207	58
Concerns about litigation	26	20	35	31	57	47	118	33
Raised awareness due to media	61	48	72	64	91	75	224	62
Raised awareness due to HSE	31	24	48	43	70	58	149	41
Feedback from employees	52	41	60	54	72	60	184	51
Other factors	19	15	11	10	11	9	41	11

A change in attitudes towards stress over the last 2 years was most likely to be associated with raised awareness due to media coverage, particularly in large companies. More sympathetic approach by management was also an important factor for medium and large companies, and to a lesser extent for small companies. Large companies were more likely to

report all factors, except management approach, than medium or small companies. Small companies were the least likely to report all factors.

As industry size increases, the percentage of companies who have a written policy to address stress related problems also increases (9% in small companies, followed by 27% in medium sized companies and 40% in large companies).

The percentage of companies who do not have a written policy to address stress related problems but who are likely to develop one within the next 12 months increases rapidly as industry size increases (21% in small companies, followed by 48% in medium sized companies and 60% in large companies).

As industry size increases, the percentage of companies who are aware of any resources to address work-related stress (e.g. information and training books, videos, risk assessment tools etc.) increases from 41% in small companies to 65% in medium sized companies to 84% in large companies.

**Table A2.5**  
**Response to Q10B 'Which of the following would help your company to address workplace stress more effectively. Each cell contains number and *percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively**

	Industry Size						Total	
	Small		Medium		Large			
HSE code of practice/legislation	118	35	109	53	119	67	346	48
Support from specialist groups	119	35	93	45	91	51	303	42
Simple risk assessment tools	131	39	112	54	98	55	341	47
Stress awareness campaigns	118	35	100	49	112	63	330	46
More printed information	138	41	102	50	95	53	335	46
IT based self-help packages	91	27	60	29	62	35	213	29
Training for line management	129	38	146	71	142	80	417	58
More staff and resources	103	30	83	40	79	44	265	37
Other	70	21	8	4	7	4	85	12
None	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	0

The most popular factor to help companies address workplace stress, overall and for large and medium companies, was appropriate training for line managers and supervisors. For small companies three factors - risk assessment tools, printed information and training for line managers - were the most often reported. For all company sizes, IT based self-help packages were thought helpful by the smallest proportion (less than 30% for small and medium companies, and 35% for large companies).

As for previous questions, large companies were the most likely to report each of the factors, and small companies least likely.

The proportion of companies who reported taking steps to reduce stress increased as company size increased from 28% among small companies to 42% among medium and 58% among large companies. Table A2.6 summarises the steps which have been taken by these companies.

**Table A2.6**  
**Response to Q12B 'Which of the steps have been taken?' Each cell contains number and *percentage* of companies who had taken steps to reduce stress ( 95 small, 87 medium, 104 large)**

	Industry Size							
	Small		Medium		Large		Total	
Stress audit	6	6	6	7	29	28	41	14
Stress awareness initiatives	31	33	31	36	69	66	131	46
Stress policy	20	21	39	45	57	55	116	41
Employees in focus groups	27	28	24	28	42	40	93	33
Counselling programme	25	26	35	40	68	65	128	45
Support from health professionals	13	14	23	26	54	52	90	31
Other	34	36	21	24	7	7	62	22

More large companies than SMEs had taken each of the specified steps to reduce workplace stress, and more medium than small companies had a stress policy, counselling programme and offered support from other health professionals. Of those companies which had taken steps to reduce stress, more large companies had evaluated their effectiveness (69%) than medium (53%) or small companies (44%).

### APPENDIX 3: INDUSTRY SECTOR

The tables in this appendix describe the key variables by industry sector, with brief discussion of the results.

**Table A3.1**  
**Response to Q3A 'Does your company consider that stress can cause work-related illness?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

Industry Sector	Does your company consider that stress can cause work-related illness?				Total
	Yes		No		
Agriculture	49	86	8	14	57
Manufacturing	64	83	13	17	77
Construction	53	79	14	21	67
Retail and Services	143	85	26	15	169
Financial	62	90	7	10	69
Transport	45	79	12	21	57
Emergency Services	23	100	0	(0)	23
Education	58	93	4	7	62
Health Care	85	95	4	5	89
Local Government	49	92	4	8	53
Total	631	87	92	13	723

Table A3.1 shows that the Emergency Services sector (100%) is more likely to consider that stress can cause work-related illness, followed by the Health Care (95%), Education (93%) and Local Government (92%) sectors as compared to the other industry sectors. However, of the 723 companies who participated in the survey, only 23 were in the Emergency Services sector compared to the next smallest industry sector, Local Government, which consisted of 53 participating companies.

**Table A3.2**  
**Response to Q3B 'Is workplace stress a problem for your company?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

Industry Sector	Is workplace stress a problem for your company?				Total
	Yes		No		
Agriculture	13	23	44	77	57
Manufacturing	16	21	61	79	77
Construction	18	27	49	73	67
Retail and Services	36	21	133	79	169
Financial	14	20	55	80	69
Transport	8	16	49	84	57
Emergency Services	15	65	8	35	23
Education	17	27	45	73	62
Health Care	31	35	58	65	89
Local Government	29	55	24	45	53
Total	197	27	526	73	723

As can be seen from Table A3.2, the Health Care sector (35%) is much more likely to consider workplace stress a problem for their company than the majority of other industry sectors, but is much less likely to do so than to the Local Government sector (55%) and the Emergency Services (65%) sector.



**Table A3.3**  
**Response to Q3C 'Over the last 12 months do you think that levels of workplace stress in your company have increased, decreased, are about the same?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Do you think that levels of workplace stress have..?</b>						<b>Total</b>
	<b>Increased</b>		<b>Decreased</b>		<b>About the same</b>		
Agriculture	11	84	1	8	1	8	13
Manufacturing	14	88	0	(0)	2	12	16
Construction	12	67	0	(0)	6	33	18
Retail and Services	23	64	0	(0)	13	36	36
Financial	10	71	0	(0)	4	29	14
Transport	5	62	0	(0)	3	38	8
Emergency Services	4	27	0	(0)	11	73	15
Education	8	47	1	6	8	47	17
Health Care	20	64	3	10	8	26	31
Local Government	16	55	1	(3)	12	42	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>197</b>

It can be seen, from Table A3.3, that levels of stress have increased least in the Emergency Services sector (27%) and in Education (47%) as compared to the other industry sectors and have increased most in the Manufacturing (88%) and Agriculture (84%) sectors.

**Table A3.4**  
**Response to Q4 'Are you aware of any of the following occurring in the last 12 months?'. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively**

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Are you aware of any of the following occurring in the last 12 months?</b>									
	<b>Increased staff absences</b>		<b>Increased staff turnover</b>		<b>Lower staff morale</b>		<b>Increased reports of stress</b>		<b>None of these</b>	
Agriculture	6	11	6	11	14	25	3	5	37	65
Manufacturing	14	18	9	12	24	31	9	12	44	57
Construction	8	12	7	10	13	19	9	13	43	64
Retail & Services	22	13	24	14	29	17	19	11	119	70
Financial	7	10	10	14	7	10	13	19	45	65
Transport	5	9	7	12	11	19	5	9	36	63
Emergency Services	9	39	5	22	13	57	9	39	7	30
Education	12	19	4	6	14	23	7	11	39	63
Health Care	19	21	21	24	27	30	16	18	45	51
Local Government	18	34	10	19	24	45	17	32	19	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>60</b>

The Emergency Services (70% of companies) and Local Government (64%) are most likely to have reported any of these factors compared to 50% of companies or fewer in the other sectors. Emergency Services report the most increased staff absences, lower staff morale and increased reports of stress; and are almost as likely as Health Care companies to report increased staff turnover. Local Government companies report particularly high occurrences of lower staff morale. Retail and Service are least likely overall to report any factors. Lower staff morale is the most commonly reported factor in all sectors except Finance, where the most common factor is increased reports of stress.

**Table A3.5**  
**Response to Q5 'Have any of the following occurred in your company in the last 12 months?'. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively**

Industry Sector	Have any of the following occurred in your company in the last 12 months?							
	Restructuring		Merger		Changed job security		Intro of new technology	
Agriculture	23	40	3	5	10	18	26	46
Manufacturing	38	49	10	13	28	36	36	47
Construction	25	37	6	9	7	10	24	36
Retail and Services	54	32	20	12	25	15	66	39
Financial	33	48	19	28	18	26	35	51
Transport	16	28	11	19	6	11	21	37
Emergency Services	16	70	4	17	6	26	18	78
Education	23	37	3	5	5	8	33	53
Health Care	35	39	13	15	14	16	23	26
Local Government	36	68	11	21	26	49	26	49
Total	299	41	10	14	145	20	308	43
			0					

Industry Sector	More flexible working roles		Increased workload		Out-sourcing of functions		None of these	
	Agriculture	19	33	24	42	13	23	8
Manufacturing	24	31	38	49	15	19	12	16
Construction	9	13	27	40	23	34	12	18
Retail and Services	37	22	65	38	19	11	48	28
Financial	20	29	32	46	18	26	16	23
Transport	11	19	21	37	10	18	19	33
Emergency Services	7	30	17	74	9	39	0	0
Education	16	26	35	56	8	13	9	15
Health Care	32	36	37	42	11	12	25	28
Local Government	20	38	41	77	21	40	3	6
Total	195	27	337	47	147	20	152	21

From Table A3.5 it can be seen that all of the Emergency Services companies and 94% of Local Government organisations reported at least one of these factors. Fewest companies in the Transport, Retail and Services and Health Care sectors reported any factors, but even in these sectors over two-thirds of companies reported at least one. Introduction of new technology was the most commonly reported factor for four the sectors (Agriculture, Retail and Services, Finance, Emergency Services) and increased workload for five (Manufacturing, Construction, Education, Health Care and Local Government). The Transport sector reported equally high occurrences of both these factors. In the Emergency Services sector 70% or more companies reported restructuring, introduction of new technology and increased workload, while more than 70% of Local Government organisations reported increased workload.

Merger was the least commonly reported factor in six of the sectors, outsourcing of functions in three and changed job security in two (for companies in the Financial sector job security and outsourcing of functions were both reported by 26% of respondents).

**Table A3.6**

**Response to Q6 'Does your company consider that stress should be controlled in the same way as other workplace health and safety issues?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Does your company consider that stress should be controlled in the same way as other workplace health and safety issues?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Agriculture	42	74	15	26	57
Manufacturing	59	77	18	23	77
Construction	48	72	19	28	67
Retail and Services	130	77	39	23	169
Financial	61	88	8	12	69
Transport	42	74	15	26	57
Emergency Services	20	87	3	13	23
Education	51	82	11	18	62
Health Care	71	80	18	20	89
Local Government	44	83	9	17	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>568</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>723</b>

Table A3.6 shows that the Financial (88%), Emergency Services (87%), Local Government (83%), Education (82%) and Health Care (80%) sectors are all more likely to consider that stress should be controlled in the same way as other workplace health and safety issues when compared to the other industry sectors.

**Table A3.7**

**Response to Q7A 'In your company would tackling workplace stress be viewed as mainly the responsibility of the employer?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>In your company would tackling workplace stress be viewed as mainly the responsibility of the employer?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Agriculture	44	77	13	23	57
Manufacturing	62	81	15	19	77
Construction	46	69	21	31	67
Retail and Services	126	75	43	25	169
Financial	59	85	10	15	69
Transport	42	74	15	26	57
Emergency Services	15	65	8	35	23
Education	51	82	11	18	62
Health Care	72	81	17	19	89
Local Government	44	83	9	17	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>723</b>

It can be seen from Table A3.7 that the following industry sectors are more likely to view tackling workplace stress as mainly the responsibility of the employer as compared to the other industry sectors: Financial (85%); Local Government (83%); Education (82%); Health Care; (81%) and Manufacturing (81%).

**Table A3.8**

**Response to Q7B 'If your company would not view tackling workplace stress to be mainly the responsibility of the employer, would it view it mainly as the responsibility of the employee?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>If your company would not view tackling workplace stress to be mainly the responsibility of the employer, would it view it mainly as the responsibility of the employee?</b>					
<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>Total</b>
Agriculture	8	62	5	39	13
Manufacturing	5	33	10	67	15
Construction	11	52	10	48	21
Retail and Services	15	34	28	65	43
Financial	5	50	5	50	10
Transport	6	40	9	60	15
Emergency Services	2	25	6	75	8
Education	2	18	9	82	11
Health Care	7	41	10	59	17
Local Government	3	33	6	67	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>162</b>

Tackling workplace stress is more likely to be viewed as mainly the responsibility of the employee in the Agriculture (62%), Construction (52%) and Financial (50%) sectors as compared to the other industry sectors [Table A3.8].

**Table A3.9**

**Response to Q8A 'In your company have attitudes towards stress changed over the last 2 years?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>In your company have attitudes towards stress changed over the last 2 years?</b>					
<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		<b>Total</b>
Agriculture	33	58	24	42	57
Manufacturing	31	40	46	60	77
Construction	20	30	47	70	67
Retail and Services	78	46	91	54	169
Financial	34	49	35	51	69
Transport	25	44	32	56	57
Emergency Services	17	74	6	26	23
Education	38	61	24	39	62
Health Care	46	52	43	48	89
Local Government	38	72	15	28	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>723</b>

From Table A3.9, it can be seen that, attitudes towards stress are more likely to have changed in the last 2 years in the Emergency Services (74%), Local Government (72%), Education (61%), and Agriculture (58%) sectors compared to the other industry sectors.

**Table A3.10**

**Response to Q8B 'Which of the following factors have been associated with a change in attitudes towards stress over the last two years. Each cell contains number and *percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively. Percentages are of the number of companies who have changed attitude to stress (see table A3.9)**

Industry Sector	Which of the following have been associated with a change in attitudes towards stress over the last 2 years?					
	More sympathetic approach from management		Concerns about costs of litigation		Raised awareness due to media coverage	
Agriculture	15	45	9	27	15	45
Manufacturing	21	68	10	32	16	52
Construction	6	30	5	25	14	70
Retail and Services	46	59	16	21	49	63
Financial	22	65	13	38	24	71
Transport	16	64	10	40	14	56
Emergency Services	10	59	10	59	12	71
Education	23	61	9	24	27	71
Health Care	28	61	18	39	26	57
Local Government	20	53	18	47	27	71
Total	207	58	118	33	224	62

Industry Sector	Raised awareness due to HSE initiatives		Feedback from employees		Other factors	
Agriculture	8	24	11	33	7	52
Manufacturing	11	23	15	48	2	6
Construction	12	60	7	35	0	0
Retail and Services	22	28	36	46	11	14
Financial	15	44	15	44	4	12
Transport	8	32	15	60	2	8
Emergency Services	12	71	13	76	0	0
Education	23	61	21	55	3	8
Health Care	17	37	26	57	3	7
Local Government	21	55	25	66	9	24
Total	149	41	184	51	41	11

A change in attitudes towards stress over the last 2 years is most likely to be associated with a more sympathetic approach from management, and raised awareness due to media coverage across all sectors. For the Emergency Services, feedback from employees is also seen as important, with around three-quarters of companies reporting an association with changing attitudes to stress. The Emergency Services (and to a lesser extent Construction companies and Educational organisations) were more likely to report an association with raised awareness due to HSE initiatives than companies from other sectors.

**Table A3.11**  
**Response to Q9A 'Does your company have a written policy to address stress related problems?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Does your company have a written policy to address stress related problems?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Agriculture	5	9	52	91	57
Manufacturing	13	17	64	83	77
Construction	11	16	56	84	67
Retail and Services	22	13	147	87	169
Financial	17	25	52	75	69
Transport	7	12	50	88	57
Emergency Services	12	52	11	48	23
Education	24	39	38	61	62
Health Care	25	28	64	72	89
Local Government	23	43	30	57	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>564</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>723</b>

Table A3.11 shows that the Emergency Services (52%), Local Government (43%) and Education (39%) sectors are more likely to have a written policy to address stress related problems.

**Table A3.12**  
**Response to Q9C 'If your company does not have a written policy to address stress related problems, is a policy likely to be developed within the next 12 months?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>If your company does not have a written policy to address stress related problems, is a policy likely to be developed within the next 12 months?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Agriculture	15	29	37	71	52
Manufacturing	31	48	33	52	64
Construction	18	32	38	68	56
Retail and Services	41	28	106	72	147
Financial	11	21	41	79	52
Transport	13	26	37	74	50
Emergency Services	10	91	1	9	11
Education	15	40	23	60	38
Health Care	30	47	34	53	64
Local Government	18	60	12	40	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>564</b>

As can be seen from Table A3.12, of the industry sectors which do not have a written policy to address stress related problems, the Emergency Services sector (91%) is most likely to develop a policy within the next 12 months, followed by the Local Government (60%), Manufacturing (48%), Health Care (47%) and Education (40%) sectors.

**Table A3.13**  
**Response to Q10A ‘Are you aware of any resources to address work-related stress (e.g. information and training books, videos, risk assessment tools etc.)?’. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

<b>Industry Sector</b>	<b>Are you aware of any resources to address work-related stress (e.g. information and training books, videos, risk assessment tools etc.)?</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>		<b>No</b>		
Agriculture	26	46	31	54	57
Manufacturing	49	64	28	34	77
Construction	32	48	35	52	67
Retail and Services	86	51	83	49	169
Financial	39	56	30	44	69
Transport	29	51	28	49	57
Emergency Services	18	78	5	22	23
Education	44	71	18	29	62
Health Care	57	64	32	36	89
Local Government	42	79	11	21	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>723</b>

The Local Government (79%), Emergency Services (78%), Education (71%), Health Care (64%) and Manufacturing (64%) are more likely to be aware of any resources that are available to address work-related stress (e.g. information and training books, videos, risk assessment tools etc.) than the other industry sectors [Table A3.13].

It can be seen from Table A3.14 that in all sectors training for line management and supervisors is seen as helpful in addressing workplace stress. An HSE code of practice is thought to be helpful by more than half of the Manufacturing, Construction and Educational organisations surveyed, and by more than three-quarters of Emergency Services and Local Governments. Around three-quarters of Emergency Services and half of Local Governments, Manufacturing, Construction and Education organisations also felt that stress awareness campaigns would be helpful; half of Emergency Services and Local Governments saw benefits in having more staff and resources.

**Table A3.14**  
**Response to Q10B 'Which of the following would help your company to address workplace stress more effectively. Each cell contains number and *percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively**

	Industry Sector																				Total	
	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Construction	Retail & Services	Financial	Transport	Emergency Services	Education	Health Care	Local Govt												
HSE code of practice	27	47	41	53	35	52	58	34	32	46	21	37	18	78	35	56	39	44	40	75	346	48
Support from specialist groups	23	40	44	57	31	46	50	30	36	52	20	35	13	57	28	45	32	36	26	49	303	42
Risk assessment tools	20	35	41	53	34	51	68	40	35	51	24	42	11	48	34	55	42	47	32	60	341	47
Stress awareness campaigns	21	37	39	51	35	52	68	40	28	41	22	39	17	74	31	50	38	43	31	58	330	46
More printed information	24	42	36	47	33	49	76	45	28	41	25	44	12	52	29	47	44	49	28	53	335	46
IT based self-help packages	14	25	24	31	21	31	43	25	23	33	9	16	8	35	26	42	22	25	23	43	213	29
Training for line management	26	46	50	65	41	61	84	50	41	59	26	46	19	83	37	60	51	57	42	79	417	58
More staff and resources	17	30	24	31	24	36	46	27	23	33	20	35	13	57	29	47	37	42	32	60	265	37
Other	14	25	5	6	6	9	25	15	7	10	12	21	0	0	2	3	13	15	1	2	85	12



**Table A3.15**

**Response to Q11 'Is your company working in partnership with other agencies (such as health promotion units, larger companies with expertise etc.) to reduce workplace stress?'. Each cell contains number in cell and *percentage of row total***

Industry Size	Is your company working in partnership with other agencies (such as health promotion units, larger companies with expertise etc.) to reduce workplace stress?				Total
	Yes		No		
Agriculture	29	51	28	49	57
Manufacturing	42	55	35	45	77
Construction	30	45	37	55	67
Retail and Services	80	47	89	53	169
Financial	40	58	29	42	69
Transport	24	42	33	58	57
Emergency Services	19	83	4	17	23
Education	39	63	23	37	62
Health Care	50	56	39	44	89
Local Government	42	79	11	21	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>723</b>

The Emergency Services (83%), Local Government (79%) and Education (63%) sectors are more likely than the other industry sectors to be working in partnership with other agencies (such as health promotion units, larger companies with expertise etc.) to reduce workplace stress (Table A3.15).

Table A3.16 shows the distribution of companies who reported taking steps to reduce workplace stress, and the proportion of these, which had evaluated the steps taken by industry sector.

**Table A3.16**

**Response to Q12A 'Has your company taken steps to reduce workplace stress?' and Q12C 'Has your company evaluated the effectiveness of the steps they have taken?'. Each cell contains number *and percentage* of companies in each cell who answered positively. Percentages for evaluation of steps are of the total number of companies which have taken steps**

Industry sector	Steps taken to reduce stress		Evaluation of steps taken	
	Agriculture	20	35	9
Manufacturing	26	34	14	54
Construction	18	27	6	33
Retail and Services	47	28	23	49
Financial	29	42	11	38
Transport	14	25	6	43
Emergency Services	15	65	3	20
Education	35	56	10	29
Health Care	46	52	18	39
Local Government	36	68	13	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>40</b>

Local Government and Emergency Services were the most likely organisations to have taken steps to reduce stress (they also had high levels of stress - Table A3.2), followed by the Education and Health Care sectors. Relatively few companies from the Construction and

Retail and Services sector had taken steps to reduce stress. However, a higher proportion of Retail and Services companies that had taken steps to reduce stress had evaluated the effectiveness of these steps (49%) than in all other sectors except Manufacturing (54%).

The steps taken to reduce stress, by industry sector, are shown in Table A3.17. Stress awareness initiatives and counselling programmes tended to be the best used steps, and stress audits the least used in most of the sectors.

**Table A3.17**  
**Response to Q12B ‘Which of the steps have been taken?’ Each cell contains number and *percentage* of companies who had taken steps to reduce stress**

	Industry Sector																					
	Agriculture		Manufacturing		Construction		Retail & Services		Financial		Transport		Emergency Services		Education		Health Care		Local Govt		Total	
Stress audit	1	5	4	15	4	22	4	9	5	17	1	7	5	33	4	11	2	4	11	31	41	14
Stress awareness initiatives	7	35	8	31	10	56	14	30	13	45	8	57	9	60	16	46	21	46	25	69	131	46
Stress policy	4	20	10	38	8	44	9	19	12	41	6	43	10	67	18	51	18	39	21	58	116	41
Employees in focus groups	6	30	8	31	6	33	10	21	8	28	4	29	5	33	14	40	20	43	12	33	93	33
Counselling programmes	6	30	6	23	5	28	11	23	16	55	8	57	12	80	22	63	20	43	22	61	128	45
Support from health professionals	3	15	6	12	4	22	6	13	11	38	3	21	10	67	16	46	16	35	15	42	90	31
Other	6	30	5	19	5	28	19	40	5	17	0	0	0	0	7	20	10	22	5	14	62	22

**Table A3.17**

**Rank order of relative importance of factors involved in making decisions about the initiatives and interventions used classified by industry sector**

**Decision making by industry sector**

<b>INDUSTRY SECTOR (RANK)</b>	<b>General Knowledge – self, family, management...</b>	<b>Information from other sources: HSE, Gov, External Consultants, Unions</b>	<b>General discussion with staff</b>	<b>Advice from OH Unit/Welfare/ GP</b>
Agriculture, fisheries, forestry	3.5	1.5	3.5	5
Manufacturing	2.5	2.5	5.5	5.5
Construction	4	1.5	--	4
Retail & Services	1	2	3	5.5
Financial	4.5	1	4.5	2.5
Transport	1	2	3	4
Emergency services	4	2.5	5	1
Education	6	4	2.5	1
Health Care	5	2	1	3.5
Local Government	6	3	4	2

<b>INDUSTRY SECTOR (RANK)</b>	<b>Programmes/ Courses</b>	<b>Information from media</b>	<b>Advice from H &amp; S / HR</b>	<b>Other</b>
Agriculture, fisheries, forestry	--	--	1.5	--
Manufacturing	5.5	5.5	1	--
Construction	--	4	1.5	--
Retail & Services	--	--	5.5	4
Financial	6.5	6.5	2.5	--
Transport	--	--	--	--
Emergency services	--	--	2.5	--
Education	5	7	2.5	--
Health Care	6.5	6.5	3.5	--
Local Government	--	5	1	--





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